

Communicating to Change Lives

“Do your best to win full approval in God’s sight, as a worker who is not ashamed of his work, one who correctly teaches the message of God’s truth.” 2 Tim. 2:15 (GN)

When it comes to handling the word of God, God wants us to be skilled. He wants us to handle it correctly.

Before we get into the core teaching for this session, I want to say a word about what I call the futility of labels. There are all kinds of different labels out there,

THE FUTILITY OF LABELS

“Topical... Textual...Expository... Life-situational...etc.”

“He’s a textual preacher... He’s an expository teacher... He’s a topical teacher.” Some of you are getting attacked by elders who believe there is only one right way to preach. So I want to give you some ammo. They heard a former preacher preach a certain way and they want you to preach that way.

We often hear about these labels or modifiers to categorize preaching – topical, textual, expository, life situational. Personally I think that’s a big waste of time trying to label any kind of preaching. I’ve given up trying to label other guy’s sermons, much less label my own. I’ve discovered that everybody has their own definition. So they’re meaningless. I have over 300 books on preaching in my library and I have learned that every book has its own definition. Today the most popular revered term is expository. It’s over used but rarely defined. I’ve collected over thirty different contradictory definitions of expository. I actually read an article recently where four professors in the same seminary were talking about expository preaching and all four of them gave a different definition.

One of the best authorities on preaching is Clyde Fant and he researched and edited the thirteen volume Twenty Centuries of Great Preaching and he had this to say

“It is impossible to define the terms textual, topical, and expository. Those terms would be great except that rarely do sermons fit neatly into a category when you actually start studying sermons throughout history. There is no modifier that can explain all that God does through preaching, or the ways that He uses. The only question that matters is, ‘Does the sermon involve itself with the truth of God’s Word?’ When it does, you have genuine preaching, and all modifiers of the term become superfluous. If you use God’s Word to bring light and change in people’s lives, then preaching has occurred, regardless of the method used.”

**Dr. Clyde Fant, Professor of Preaching
Editor, *20 Centuries of Great Preaching* (13 Vol.)**

I think that’s a great quote.

And with that in mind I’d now like to give you my definition for expository preaching:

My definition of expository preaching:

“When the message is centered around explaining and applying the Bible for life change.”

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Notice what it doesn't say in that definition. It says nothing about the amount of text used, which is purely a manmade designation. It says nothing about the location of the verses – whether they're all in a row or from several different books of the Bible. These are really just manmade issues. We often take our favorite method of preaching and just try to make a biblical basis for it. But the truth is, God, for 2000 years has used all different styles of preaching through many different personalities in many different cultures and as a result the church has continued to be blessed and grown.

Teaching Tip

Depending on the country where you are teaching, the false idea that there is only one way to preach may be a major issue or it may be no issue at all. If it's a major issue, the material below is provided for you to teach. If it's no issue at all, skip this material and go straight to Rick's story or YOUR story of how you began to preach for life change.

How much text is a text?

It depends on what preacher you're talking to. G. Campbell Morgan often used an entire book of the Bible to preach from. He'd take a book of the Minor Prophets and whole sermon would be on that – a message on the book. Alexander McClaren, his favorite thing was to preach in paragraphs. He'd pick a paragraph and always use that. Calvin's method of preaching was usually to use two to three and sometimes four verses in a message. Spurgeon usually chose just an isolated text, like a phrase, a part of a sentence. He would use like just a part of a sentence for his entire message. And of course, D Martin Lloyd Jones often would preach on one word. He's got a very famous sermon called, "But God". There's no one right way. I heard about a guy who preached a sermon on the word "But". It was like ... "Point number one, We all have butts. Number two, Your butt is usually bigger than somebody else's butt. Three, It's harder to see your butt than somebody else's butt." That will preach! That's a life changing message right there!

I don't care whether you preach verse by verse through a book or verse with verse, taking it from different parts of the book as long as you actually deal with the text once you get there. I don't think God cares two bits about whether they take verse by verse or whether they take verses from different parts of the Bible, as long as the verses are adequately exposed, explained and applied. Everything else is just manmade and don't let anybody else put you in a straight jacket. God gave you your personality and you'll figure out the method that's best for you.

Most of us learn textual exposition in seminary.

Textual Exposition.

1. Select a paragraph or more of text. (preferably in a series through a book)
2. Study the *historical, grammatical, theological* background of that text.
3. Outline the text into natural divisions.
4. Add illustrations and make applications.

Best book on this: *Biblical Preaching* by Haddon Robinson

We were all taught that way in school. And by the way, the best book on that, in my opinion is Haddon Robinson's book Biblical Preaching. Haddon is a good friend and if that's the method you use the priority of your time, that's the book you really ought to study.

But when I hear people say, "The only way to grow a church is through verse by verse preaching," I want to say, "Oh really? Let's look at your church."

Recently I read this quote. A guy was speaking at some lectures on preaching at one of the seminaries. He said, "Any kind of preaching other than verse by verse exposition is an aberration from apostolic norm." There's a little problem with that! Not one of the preachers in the Bible were verse by verse preachers. Peter wasn't, Paul wasn't, James wasn't, Jesus wasn't – not one of them. So how do you say that's the apostolic norm? Show me one example in the Bible where anybody took a chapter of the Old Testament, parsed the words, developed an outline, alliterated it and showed illustrations. It isn't there. So don't try to make the Bible your defense for a method that you happen to like and God blesses in your life. Let God bless it but don't insist that everybody use the hammer the way you use the hammer. Phillip Brooks said,

"Preaching is truth through a personality." Phillip Brooks

And if that's true and I do believe it then we shouldn't be surprised that there's many different styles and many different methods as there are personalities. Did God give us all the same personality? No. And He did that intentionally so I don't think He even expects us all to preach in the same way.

I'd like to share an additional method that I have found to be a effective. We developed it here over the years here at Saddleback. The truth is I'm humbled about what God has done here and how God has used the teaching, the preaching. Nobody's more surprised than I am. As I said earlier: I was told this week that we have baptized 7400 new believers in the last six years. This year we've brought in 3500 new members alone. That is humbling to me. But I'm most of all thrilled not by the numbers. I am most of all thrilled by the level of commitment and maturity I see taking place in the lives of our people. They are phenomenal in their commitment to Jesus Christ, to each other, to being involved in ministry, to having a ministry, to being involved in mission. We had over 4000 people this last year make commitments to do an overseas mission trip, to go on mission for Christ. Four thousand going out sharing their faith, going overseas at their own expense. Those kinds of things are amazing. And when I see the number of tithers going up and the number of people reading their Bible and the number of people trying to have family devotions, that's what turns me on – the individual lives. I'm genuinely thrilled by the fruit that we see here.

In 1980 when I started Saddleback church, I completely changed my whole style of delivery and preparation too. Before I started Saddleback I had been preaching for about ten years and I had lots of sermons in the bucket that I could have pulled out and used. As you know, if you've read the book, I went out and went door to door the first twelve weeks of Saddleback's history, just talking to people, just finding out what they thought about life and finding out what their needs were and finding out their interests and all these things. And finding out what their biggest complaints of the church were. One of the four biggest complaints I discovered about the church in this area was they said "Sermons are boring and they don't relate to my life." I didn't find anybody who said they didn't believe in God. A lot of people said they believed in

God, they believed in Jesus. “I just didn’t like church. If I found a church that really ministered to my needs and really helped me, I’d probably go.”

So I went back and took ten years of messages and I looked through ten years of sermons that I’d collected and I asked myself one simple question. I didn’t ask, “Was it doctrinally correct?” I did not ask, “Was it homiletically sound?” I did not ask, “Did all the points start with ‘P’?”

But I asked “Would this message make sense to an unchurched person? To somebody who had no religious background at all? Would this make sense to that kind of person?”

I threw out every message I’d preached in ten years except two. And I started over. And I developed a whole new style of teaching and preaching. Over the years I developed the CRAFT method which we talked about yesterday and preparing messages. And I developed a series of eight questions I asked myself that helped me form the delivery of what I’m going to say.

There are thousands of baseball pitchers in America. They all stand 60 feet 6 inches away from the home plate. They all throw the same 2¾-inch ball. But the difference between an amateur and a pro pitching is delivery.

That’s the difference between a good and a great message. You can have phenomenal content but if you don’t deliver it in the right way it will be an average message. A lot of guys have good content but they don’t have good delivery. They don’t know how to capture a moment, they don’t know how to keep people’s attention. So I began to develop a series of eight questions. We’re going to go over those today.

Proverbs 16:23

***“Intelligent people think before they speak; what they say is then more persuasive.”
Pr. 16:23 (GN)***

Would you like to be more persuasive in your preaching? I would. I’m constantly interested in learning to be a more persuasive communicator because we’re in the life change business.

THE BIBLICAL METHOD OF WISE PREACHERS: ECCL. 12:9-11

“Because the Teacher was wise, he taught the people everything he knew. He collected proverbs and classified them. Indeed, the Teacher taught the plain truth, and he did so in an interesting way. A wise teacher’s words spur students to action and emphasize important truths. The collected sayings of the wise are like guidance from a shepherd.” Eccl. 12:9-11 (NLT)

Notice all the preparation involved:

He ponders. In other words, he carefully thinks about.
He searched out. He researched and he studied.
He arranged. As he categorizes them. He sets things in order. There’s a logical order.
He looks for just the right words. He didn’t cut any corners.

This preacher is worth listening to because he did his homework. And the result is it says his words are like goads and like well-driven nails.

Two results of this kind of preaching:

- ***“goad” = It spurs people to action. It motivates you to do something!***
- ***“well-driven nail” = People will remember it! Firmly embedded! Driven deep!***

A point that is well prepared and delivered is like a goad. A goad is a sharp stick that you use to guide animals. Like an electric cattle prod. A goad spurs cattle to action.

And that's what you want to do with your messages. You want to motivate people to get going. You want to motivate them to do something.

Based on this verse...

The best crafted points are ACTION STEPS.

Sometimes you use a goad. Jesus comforted the afflicted and He afflicted the comfortable. In your ministry you will always have to have this balance between comfort and affliction, of building up, holding up and firing up. But the Bible says that the words of a wise speaker, a wise preacher, are like goads.

Then it also says they are like well-driven nails. They're firmly embedded. They're driven deep. If I were to take a nail and drive it into wood, it's not easy to pull it out. They don't forget it quickly. It's remembered.

The best crafted points MAKE THE TRUTH MEMORABLE.

The best crafted truths and the best-crafted messages make a truth memorable. They're like nails. They're driven in and you can't pull them out. You remember what was said.

Unfortunately, the day after I preach sometimes I can't remember what I've said. So I don't think that's been a good nail.

My question is: What kind of preaching spurs to action? What kind of style of delivery spurs to action? What kind of delivery and communication style is best for life change?

My answer is: The style Jesus used. Because nobody changed more lives than Jesus.

OUR PREACHING MODEL: JESUS CHRIST

Not John the Baptist, not Paul, and not any contemporary preacher. Jesus is your primary model for preaching. He was the master communicator. In Matthew 7:28 it says, *“The crowds were amazed at Jesus' sermons.”* Sometimes they're confused at my sermons but they were amazed at Jesus' sermons.

In John 12:49

***“The Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it.”
John 12:49***

Circle both of those phrases. Notice that Jesus took His direction from the Father and He not only was told what to say (content) but Jesus was told by the Father how to say it (delivery). We'll often focus for years of our lives on what Jesus had to say. But most of the time we never pay any attention to how Jesus said it. Yet that was also given to Him by the Father. His delivery style came from the Father.

So when preparing a message I ask myself eight questions. Two of the questions have to do with what to say and six of the questions have to do with how to say it. Two of the questions deal with content, six of the questions deal with delivery.

EIGHT QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU PREACH

- 1. Who are the listeners?**
- 2. What does the Bible say about their needs?**
- 3. What is the most practical way to say it?**
- 4. What is the most positive way to say it?**
- 5. What is the most encouraging way to say it?**
- 6. What is the simplest way to say it?**
- 7. What is the most personal way to say it?**
- 8. What is the most interesting way to say it?**

Let's get right into this. First you ask...

I. WHO ARE THE LISTENERS?

Jesus always started with His audience. He knew their thoughts. In the same way Paul started with his audience. 1 Corinthians 9

“When I am with those whose consciences bother them easily, I don't act as though I know it all and don't say they are foolish; the result is that they are willing to let me help them. Yes, whatever a person is like, I try to find common ground with him so that he will let me tell him about Christ and let Christ save him.” 1 Cor 9:22 (TLB)

“Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them...” Luke 11:17 (NIV)

So I ask “Who will be my audience?” I ask myself three questions:

3 questions

- **What are their needs?**
- **What are their hurts?**
- **What are their interests?**

I picture my congregation in my mind and I think What are their needs, the problems the stresses, the challenges that they're facing? What are their hurts because the truth is everybody's hurting somewhere? What are their interests? What issues are they thinking about?

In communication, the hearer is always asking the question, What does this mean to me? You're doing that right now. As I'm sitting up here droning on and on in the afternoon, you're saying, "What does this have to do with me?" and if you find any value in what I'm saying you're tuning in. On the other hand, if you see no value in what I'm talking about you're thinking about all kinds of other stuff. The listener is always asking, Is this something I value?

I saw a cartoon a while back. A guy's sitting on the side of his bed and he's all bug-eyed and his hair is all frizzled. He's on the phone and says, "My wife just left me. I lost my job and my spirits have hit bottom. Pastor, you've got to help me! What is the difference between pre-, post- and ammilennialism?" (Cartoon included in POWERPOINT)

The reason why many pastors struggle with sermon preparation is because we ask the wrong question. The wrong question is "What should I preach on this Sunday?" The right question is, "To whom will I be preaching?" Not what should I preach on but to whom will I be preaching. People's needs are the key to what God wants to say.

Do you believe God is omniscient? Sure you do. Do you believe God already knows in advance who's going to be at your church next Sunday? Of course He does. Why would God give you a message to preach on that is totally irrelevant to the needs of the people He's planning on bringing? He wouldn't. So what you need to do is say, "God, You already know who's going to be at church next week. And You already know what their needs are because You're omniscient. I don't know but You do. So God why don't You tell me what You want to say to the people You're bringing?" You think about the person and you visualize them in your mind. You think about them before you start any delivery.

Can something be true and be irrelevant at the same time? Certainly. Imagine you go to a dentist and you've got an abscessed tooth and you've got a major pain and you walk in saying, "I'm in so much pain!" and the doctor wants to talk about the Greek word for toothbrush! Or the background of oral surgery. You're going, "That's great, doctor. But I'm in pain."

Or you're in a car accident and you're bleeding to death and the paramedics rush you into the emergency room and the doctor before he begins to operate on you wants to talk about fifteen minutes on the history of the stethoscope.

It's true but it's not relevant.

A man comes to church and says, "My wife is leaving me and my daughter is pregnant and my son is on drugs," and I get up and talk about the different positions of the guards around the temple. What does that mean to that person at that point? He's saying, "I need help right now!" So you've got to get to the point quicker.

And to get their attention you begin with a need or a hurt or an interest.

This principle is used by everybody in the entire world except preachers. Educators know that you always begin with the student's need and not with the curriculum. Any teacher will tell you that. Managers know that you always begin with the employee's complaint and not your agenda. Salesmen know that you always begin with the customer not the product.

Only pastors think we can start off and talk about whatever we want to and eventually get to the application thinking they're just going to hang on. Most of us eventually do application in our message. I'm just saying you need to start where most of your messages end up. You need to start with the application right up front. "I'm going to tell you five reasons today you don't need to worry based upon what Jesus said in Matthew 6." When Paul spoke to the Jews he began with Jewish history. But when Paul spoke to pagans on Mars Hill he quoted their poets. He spoke about current events and he spoke about things in their city. He didn't even quote a scripture. Why? He was starting where the people were.

God says: begin with the hearer!

Every communicator, every preacher, needs to understand something called the RAS.

RAS: Your Reticular Activating System

(Picture included on POWERPOINT)

At the back of your brain at your brain stem is a filter that God put in your brain to keep you from having to consciously respond to every stimuli – everything you see, taste, touch, smell, feel. If you had to consciously respond to every sight and every sound in life, you'd go crazy. So God put a filter in your brain. You can find this in any neurology textbook on the brain and it's called the Reticular Activating System. If something is going to get your attention it has to get through that filter before it gets your attention.

Scientists have done study after study in this and discovered that there are three things that get our attention. Three things get through the Reticular Activating System. This has profound implications for preaching and teaching. Because if you want to keep people's attention you've got to know what gets through the RAS, what gets through that filter. They discovered the things that get our attention are,

3 Things Get Our Attention

"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."
Eph 4:29 (NIV)

1. Things that are unusual

2. Things that threaten us!

3. Things we value!

If it's not one of those three things you don't notice it. For instance, if I were to say, "Can you hear the cars going by outside on the freeway?" If you stop and begin to listen and we were quiet you would hear them. You would begin to focus on them. But right now your mind just tunes them out. It's just irrelevant, extraneous sound.

This happens all the time. For instance, have you ever bought a new car and then all of a sudden you see that model everywhere? What happened? All of a sudden something you have become of value and now you see it. Those cars were there all along. You just start noticing them now because now they are of value to you. Have you ever decided to buy a refrigerator and all of a sudden you see refrigerator ads everywhere in the newspaper? Yes. Why?

Because now it is something you value. All of a sudden you're tuned in and you see it. They've been there all along but you were tuned out because it wasn't things you value.

Of those three – things we value, things that threaten us, and things that are unique – I happen to believe that only one of those is a legitimate way to share the gospel. That is by showing its value to the individual.

I don't think you want to use uniqueness to try to get people to listen to you. That means every week you have to have a different gimmick. And if you have a gimmick this week next week you have to have a bigger gimmick to have them back and a bigger gimmick the next week and so on. That's an endless cycle you're going to go into.

And I certainly don't believe in threatening people into heaven. I don't believe in fear evangelism. I do believe in the reality of hell but I don't believe in fear evangelism because I find that it usually lasts as long as the fear does. I don't think you scare people into heaven.

I tell people, You need to receive Jesus Christ not because you're going to die tonight but because you've got to live tomorrow. You may die tonight. I don't know that. None of us are sure when that's going to happen and it's a gamble. But the likelihood is you're going to live tomorrow and you need Christ to live. So we use the values. We show how the gospel adds value to people's life.

II. WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT THEIR NEEDS?

Jesus always spoke to people's needs hurts or interests. If you don't get anything I say this afternoon get this: study Jesus. Go home and study the teaching and the preaching of Jesus. Not the content but how He said what He said. When you do that, as I said earlier, we don't have to show the Bible's relevant. We just have to apply it to today's needs.

Jesus always spoke to people's needs, hurts, or interests:

"So Jesus told them, 'I'm not teaching you my own thoughts, but those of God who sent me.'" John 7:16 (TLB)

"So the usual vast crowd was there as he stepped from the boat; and he had pity on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he taught them many things they needed to know." (Mark 6:34 TLB)

"He has appointed me to preach Good News to the poor; he has sent me to heal the broken-hearted and to announce that captives shall be released, and the blind shall see, that the downtrodden shall be freed from their oppressors, and that God is ready to give blessings to all who come to him." Luke 4:18-19 (LB)

We don't have to make the Bible relevant. It is!

But we do have to SHOW its relevance by APPLYING it to today's needs.

Which is more effective. We've been talking about topical exposition or verse by verse preaching. Which is more effective? You need both for a healthy church. I believe you need both for a healthy church. I believe that topical or verse with verse exposition is the most

effective way to preach evangelistically. I believe that verse by verse is the most effective way to get people to know God's word – the Bible – in a consistent way. So we try to do both.

What do these men have in common? Wesley, Calvin, Spurgeon, Finney, Moody, Billy Graham, Jesus, Peter and Paul. And the answer is none of them were verse by verse preachers. None. I'm not saying that's bad. I do verse by verse preaching. I think you do too. I'm just saying don't let anybody tell you it's the only way to teach. There are many ways to teach God's word.

I read this one time from Charles Finney's autobiography. He said, "People have often said to me, 'Brother Finney, you don't preach. You talk to people.' A man in London went home from one of our meetings greatly convicted. He'd been a skeptic and his wife, seeing him greatly excited, said to him, 'Have you been to hear Mr. Finney preach?' He replied, 'I've been to Mr. Finney's meeting. He doesn't preach. He explains what other people preach about.' This in substance is what I have heard over and over again why they say, 'Anybody could preach as you do. You just talk to people. You talk as if you have sat in their parlor.' Others have said, 'It doesn't seem like preaching at all but it seems like Mr. Finney has taken me along and was talking with me face to face.' My habit has always been to study the gospel and the best application of it all the time. I go out among the people and I learn their wants and then in the light of the Holy Spirit I take a subject I think will meet their present necessity, I think on it intensely and pray much over the subject and then deliver it on Sunday morning."

The point is, he says, I start hearing what does God want to say to the people He's going to bring.

I don't think God cares two bits what style you use as long as you really do deal with the text.

HOW TO DISCOVER WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT PEOPLE'S NEEDS:

I search through the Bible for everything I can find on the subject, collecting and categorizing, trying to find all that God wants me to say. There are two parts to discovering what the Bible has to say:

1. RESEARCH: STUDY WITH YOUR MIND *(the technical part of sermon prep) "Exegesis"*

The technical part of sermon preparation, this researching, is commonly called exegesis. This is the serious study of the text. You're asking what does it say. And you're asking what does it mean.

1. What does it SAY?

2. What does it MEAN?

I'm assuming that you already know how to do this because it's taught in every Bible school and seminary.

The serious study of any text begins with understanding 4 things:

the historical background of the text

the *literary style* of the text

the *grammatical structure* of the text

the *theological framework* of the text

Let me just be honest. Somebody needs to say this so I will. You don't have to know Greek to grow a church. Let me give you a little guilt relief for some of you. There are plenty of good word studies out now that will tell you exactly the meaning of any particular word without you knowing the Greek behind it. It's really kind of crazy for me to pick up a Bible that was translated by the 100 top Bible scholars at that time and then for me to think I'm going to find something better. If I find something different than this, guess what? I'm wrong! They picked out the best word for that word. And it was a committee of probably a hundred and something great scholars who spent their lives doing this. So it's pretty presumptuous for me to think that I'm going to find something that all the scholars didn't find or hadn't already interpreted. If there were a more accurate word most likely it would have made it to that committee. Throughout history very few of the great preachers have been Greek scholars. There were some but very few of them.

With all the resources today you don't have to know Greek and Hebrew.

HOW DO YOU FIND RELEVANT BIBLE VERSES?

How do you study the Bible in order to find verses that address people's need?

1. Develop the habit of MEMORIZING Bible verses.

So many times the Holy Spirit just brings to mind verses in my mind that - if I hadn't spent years studying and memorizing - He couldn't have done that. The more scripture you memorize, the more effective your preaching is going to be. No doubt about it. There's nothing more powerful than quoting a verse from memory when you're preaching. There's nothing more powerful than the quoted word of God. It is truth through a personality. You want to memorize scripture so you can quote it without having to read it when it comes to mind. The more scripture you memorize the easier it becomes to find verses that relate to whatever you're particularly studying.

2. Make a list of ALL THE WORDS related to your subject.

If you're going to do a series you're going to want to make a long list of words. For instance, some of you are familiar with the series I did on The Purpose Driven Life, a ten-week series. I made a list of 56 words that were related to this idea of living a purpose driven life, like God's will and the will of God, the will of the Lord, life, balance, planning, purpose, vision, counts, organization, matter, worthwhile, worthless, ability, meaning, gift, heart, work, goal, desire, attention, steps, motivation, affections, boredom, quality, virtues, choice, choosing, faithful, race, call, mission, and on and on. Then of those 56 words I researched them in eight different translations and ended up picking over 1000 verses to use in that series. And I actually ended up using over 300 during the ten weeks.

Teaching Tip

At this point in the seminar, Rick Warren shows a copy of the binder that he used for this series, in which he placed all of these verses. Any time you can **SHOW** people the way that you have done something, it provides them a model to follow. You may not have a binder of verses, yet even several pages of verses printed out can give a picture of how to do this.

I collected them all in the binder and now I have a binder with all the verses on Purpose in different translation and all the verses on Mission and things like that.

You just make a list, collect them.

3. Look for verses during your PERSONAL DEVOTION TIME.

4. If possible: Use concordances to discover all that God has said about the subject.

The old way I used to do is take twenty bibles, lay them all out, take a concordance and look it up and look up all of them together and it would take hours and hours and hours. Then my life was changed by software. I love living in this day and age. You can find hundreds of verses so much quicker. There are many different Bible software programs.

Teaching Tip

If Specific software tools are available in the country in which you are presenting this seminar, show them here.

You make a list of all the words related to your subject, you use a concordance to discover all that God says about the subject.

Then...

5. Use a notebook to create your own **PERSONAL TOPICAL BIBLE**.

As your files grow this part becomes easier. For instance, if you do a study on “joy” you collect all your verses on joy and then the next time you come back to study joy you’ve already collected the verses. You don’t have to go find them all again.

CATEGORIZE AS YOU COLLECT

As I collect these verses I begin to group them in groups, look for similarities between verses, reoccurring themes. Sometimes things just pop out at you. The first thing you look for is similarities between verses.

1. Look for **SIMILARITIES** between verses.

The second thing you look for is reoccurring themes.

2. Look for **REOCCURRING** themes.

You ask the six journalistic questions. Rudyard Kipling called them, “My six faithful serving friends.”

Ask the 6 journalistic questions: *who, what, when, where, why, & how.*

I’m not going to go into that in real detail but in chapter four of the book Personal Bible Study Methods I talk about how to use those questions. It’s called the thematic method of Bible study.

This step can be done *years* in advance!

Set up a system for collecting, filing, preserving, and retrieving your study notes.

While I don’t like to study for individual messages until right before we start dealing with it, I do preparation for series sometimes a decade in advance. Easily. One of the most effective series I’ve ever preached here at Saddleback, when we moved into this building, I did a series in the fall of '95 on Psalm 23. It was verse by verse through Psalm 23. During seven weeks we had 446 professions of faith. It was an incredibly effective series. I had been saving material on Psalm 23 since I had been in college. So I had 15-20-25 years of material ready to look at. When I got ready to start studying “*He leads me beside still waters,*” I wasn’t just going “Now

what am I going to say about this?" So the preparation and the categorizing and the collecting stage can be done way in advance. Just set up a filing system or file on your computer – you can search it faster.

This is one of the most helpful habits you can develop as a preacher. That is the habit of collecting and categorizing every day of your life.

Develop the habit of collecting & categorizing EVERY SINGLE DAY OF YOUR LIFE!

It will save you hours in the long run, your messages will be meatier. It's a very powerful habit.

Some of you guys are not good at this but your wife is great at it. My wife is a ten times better illustrator-finder than me. I'm an outliner; she's an illustrator. I can read the exact same article and miss something. She instantly thinks, "That applies!" Find people around you who can help you out and there are volunteers who will help you.

2. REFLECT: LISTEN WITH YOUR HEART

(the devotional part of sermon prep)

"I will study your commandments and reflect on your ways." Psalm 119:15 (NLT)

WHEN?

When do I do that? All the time. I do it 24 hours a day. I do it in a quiet study but I do it all the time. You can do it when you're driving. You can do it when you're showering. You can do it running on a treadmill... you can do it most of the time. God has repeatedly promised in His word that He blesses us when we reflect on it.

The word for "reflection" in the Bible is the word "meditation".

Reflection is just another word for MEDITATION.

God has promised over and over in scripture that when we meditate on the word that He will give us wisdom. Psalm 119:99

*"I have more insight than all my teachers because I meditate on your statutes."
Psalm 119:99 (NIV)*

I don't just research them. I reflect on them. I don't just study them. I contemplate them. I don't just research and think from a logical viewpoint. I let it soak in my mind.

It's very ironic to me that seminary taught me how to research but it didn't teach me how to reflect. I never had a class on how to reflect on scripture, how to think through, how to meditate. What is meditation? If you talk to your people they're going to say put your legs in a crossed lotus position and go "Hmmmmmm."

What is meditation? FOCUSED THINKING.

A synonym for "meditation" is "to contemplate", to be fascinated with. If you were to look up the word "meditation" in a dictionary, a synonym of meditation is the word "rumination." Rumination is what a cow does when it chews its cud. It chews up the grass, then it swallows it, lets it sit

there in its stomach for a while, later on it burps it back up with renewed flavor, chews on it a little bit more, swallows it again. What's it doing? It's ruminating. It's meditating.

That's what meditation is. Meditation is simply thought digestion. It's thinking about it over and over and over.

How many of you know how to worry? If you know how to worry, you already know how to meditate. Worry is just negative meditation. When you take a negative idea and think on it over and over we call that worry. When you take a piece of scripture and think on it over and over, we call that meditation. It's just being fascinated with a verse, mulling it around in your mind.

Here's an important fact.

IMPORTANT: You cannot RUSH reflection.

And if this part is left out of your sermon prep because you're doing the Saturday night messages, when you do those you're not going to have time for reflection. And it is the reflection part of your study that will get you to the application, not the research. Commentaries almost never give you the application. So you don't want to spend a whole lot of time with them. You want to spend more time reflecting and thinking. You need to allow days to think about your subject. I write my sermon outlines on Fridays, because we have Saturday night services and I type the message Saturday morning. I just like to have it fresh in my mind. But I start thinking about it days ahead ... as soon as the new week starts I start thinking about the new message. I'm meditating and thinking and I'm not rushing it.

Most pastors start too late in the week thinking about their message so they miss the reflection part. They get the research done but they don't get the reflection. The more time you allow for incubation of an idea, the better the idea is going to be.

Your most creative thoughts will come AFTER A TIME OF REST.

Your most creative thoughts will be after a day of rest. So you need to plan for your creativity time to come after your rest. Relaxation is a very essential part of creativity. Pressure kills an awful lot of great ideas. You know they talk about writer's block because they're writing under a deadline. Have you ever had preacher's block? Of course you have. It's when you're pressured. When you're pressured you're not rested and when you're not rested you're not creative. You've got to start early enough in the week and let it simmer.

Let it simmer!

You insert the idea in your mind and then you forget it for about a day, at least. You let your subconscious work.

Many times I'll do it at night as I'm going to sleep. I'll say, "God, I need You to help me organize this outline. I need Your angle, Your direction on which way to take the people this week." And I go to sleep with a question. I ask God a question in prayer as I go to sleep. Many times I wake up the next morning and sometime that morning, bam!, it just comes out. Your subconscious is never relaxing. It's always kind of mulling. It never gets tired. Just let your unconscious mind play with it. Say, "Holy Spirit, make sense of this!"

WHAT I DO DURING REFLECTION

1. I listen to what God is saying TO ME.

I lay aside all the technical, all the commentaries and I just like to pray,

***“Let me understand the teaching of your precepts; then I will meditate on your wonders.”
Psalm 119:27 (NIV)***

As I look at a verse, I read, I re-read, I re-re-read... the text. Over and over and over. And I read it in every translation possible and every paraphrase and I think about how it applies to me, how it applies to our church, how it applies to our culture. I listen and let God speak to me.

2. I RECORD any insights I have.

Sometimes I write them down. And sometimes I literally record them. You can keep a small tape recorder in your car. You always ought to have a notepad. Because ideas come to you in the strangest places.

Success is the management of good ideas. Everybody has good ideas. You have great ideas. The issue is what do you do with them. And you can't do anything with them if you haven't remembered them. And you can't remember them if you don't record them. Everybody's got good ideas. You have brilliant ideas for your church, your family. But if you don't write them down, if you don't get them recorded you can't work on them.

Just because you can't act on it doesn't mean you don't want to get it down. Get it down, get it in a list. I could show you a list of my idea lists in different areas. There are ideas on that list that I've had for Saddleback Church that have been there almost twenty years, almost from the start of the church. One day we'll get to them. But just because you can't do it now doesn't mean you shouldn't keep them. This year we did some things I thought up about ten years ago for our church. You've just got to be patient. You can't do it all at once. Rome was not built in a day. It takes time to build a solid ministry. When God wants to make a mushroom He takes six minutes. When God wants to make an oak tree He takes sixty years. You want to be a mushroom or an oak tree? I can show you how to grow a church but I cannot show you how to grow it fast. If it's going to be solid it doesn't happen that way. It's built a little bit at a time. I can show you how to build a great message but I can't show you how to do one in an hour. It takes time. Anything worth doing takes time.

Discovering how the Bible relates to needs is hard work!

“Ezra had worked hard to know and obey the teachings of the LORD and to teach his rules and commands to the Israelites.” (Ezra 7:10 NCV)

***“I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes.”
(Psa 119:99 NIV)***

Once you've thought about those who will be listening and you've focused on what the Bible has to say to meet their need, now you begin to focus on the task of delivery and how you're going to deliver it. So there are six questions I ask that help me decide how I'm going to deliver my message. Two questions on what I'm going to say, and six questions on how to say it.

III. WHAT IS THE MOST PRACTICAL WAY TO SAY IT?

Christianity is a lifestyle. Jesus said in John 10 *"I've come that you might have life,"* So preaching as we've said many times must teach people how to live. The Bible says

***"Don't only hear the message, but put it into practice, otherwise you are merely deluding yourselves."* James 1:22 (Ph)**

It's not enough just to interpret scripture; you've got to apply it in a practical way.

Let's look at these verses

***"Now you must tell them the sort of character which should spring from sound teaching."* Titus 2:1 (Ph)**

***"Jesus told him, 'Go and do likewise.'"* Luke 10:37 (NIV)**

Interpretation without application is abortion. You have to have both. The problem is in many of our churches people sit week after week taking notes on material totally unrelated to what they're going to do.

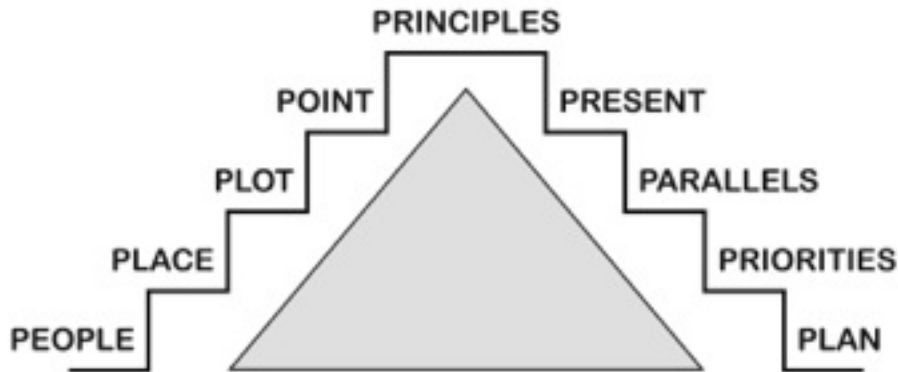
IF THE GOAL OF TEACHING IS CHANGED LIVES, THEN PRACTICAL APPLICATION IS THE PRIMARY TASK!

Application answers 2 important questions: SO WHAT? & NOW WHAT?

How do you make your teaching more practical? And how do you deliver it in a more practical way? Here are several different ways to think through application of the Bible's truth to daily life. The application pyramid, the application window and an application acrostic.

1. THE APPLICATION PYRAMID

Adapted from Dave Veerman (senior editor of *Life App. Bible*)



questions to ask:

Nine

PEOPLE: Who are the people in this passage & how are they like us today?

PLACE: What is the setting & what are the similarities to our world?

PLOT: What is happening, is there any conflict or tension,
and how would I have acted or felt in that situation?

POINT: What was the intended message for that audience?
What is the purpose of the passage?
What did God want them to learn or feel or do?

PRINCIPLES: What are the timeless truths?

PRESENT: How is this relevant to our world today?

PARALLELS: Where does this truth apply to my life?
(at home, work, school, church, neighborhood)

PERSONAL: What needs to change in me?
(a belief, value, attitude, or action)

PLAN: What will be my first step of action?

2. THE APPLICATION WINDOW

From Bruce Wilkinson, Founder of *Walk Thru The Bible*

2 TIM. 3:16-17

DOCTRINE <i>What should I</i> <u><i>BELIEVE?</i></u>	INSTRUCTION IN RIGHTEOUSNESS <i>How should I</i> <u><i>BEHAVE?</i></u>
CORRECTION <i>What should I</i> <u><i>NOT BELIEVE?</i></u>	REPROOF <i>How should I</i> <u><i>NOT BEHAVE?</i></u>

Answer these four questions and you'll have an application.

3. MY APPLICATION ACROSTIC

12 questions to ask about the text

IS THERE...

Attitude to adjust?
Promise to claim?
Priority to change?
Lesson to learn?
Issue to resolve?
Command to obey?
Activity to avoid or stop?
Truth to believe?
Idol to tear down?
Offense to forgive?
New direction to take?
Sin to confess?

HOW TO MAKE YOUR PREACHING MORE PRACTICAL

1. ALWAYS AIM FOR A SPECIFIC RESPONSE.

“...teach them to DO everything I have commanded you...” Matt. 28:20 (CEV)

The most important question after you’ve studied the text:

WHAT SPECIFIC RESPONSE AM I GOING TO ASK FOR?

- What do I want them to **THINK?**
- What do I want them to **FEEL?**
- What do I want them to **DO?**

What do you want them to do? Nothing becomes dynamic until it becomes specific.

Clarify your *behavioral objective*

You also need a Behavioral objective for every sermon!
Condense your objective into a single sentence.

There may be many possible applications- but you need to focus.

ILL: My wife did her college degree in education.
She told me- in writing lesson plans...
If she didn't write out a behavioral objective = F!

Tell them WHY & Show them HOW.

This is what people need. I'm convinced that people today don't need deeper interpretation. They just need clearer application. They need to be told how. The Bible is far more understandable than we give it credit for. In many ways seminary teaches us to teach people that they really can't understand the Bible without scholarship. That's not true. Scholarship helps but remember the Bible was written for the common man. It wasn't even written in classical Greek. It was written in *koine* Greek which was the street language of the day. It was written in the average, everyday, simple language. And God made it so simple nobody could say it was too hard to understand. If you had to have a scholarly interpretation on every verse of the Bible to understand it, most of the Christians throughout history would never have understood the Bible. So the Bible is far more understandable than we give it credit for.

Of course, the simple thing is to use a modern translation people can understand. If you use King James Version you are going to have to interpret it. I know why some guys like King James - it gives them something to preach on. They read it in King James and say, “What this means is...” If you read it in a modern translation it's pretty clear. “*Love your neighbor as yourself.*”

A lot of scriptures don't need interpretation. They just need application.

For instance: “*Forgive one another just as Christ has forgiven you.*” That doesn't need interpretation. It needs, “Who are five people in your life you need to forgive?” “*Love your neighbor as yourself.*” That doesn't need interpretation. You just need to say, “What are five ways that you could love your neighbor as yourself?” When the Bible says “*Do everything without murmuring and complaining,*” you don't need any interpretation on that. It's just “*Don't*

do anything with murmuring and complaining!" You need to say, "Where are the three places in your life you are most likely to complain?" And talk about those.

It's the application that people need.

If you want a good example of this, the best example I know is Acts 2, Peter's sermon at Pentecost.

"The words of Peter moved them deeply, and they said to him...'What should we do?'"
Acts 2:37 (LB)

It began with people's questions, They saw the signs and wonders and asked, "What does this mean?" and he explains it and they say, "What shall we do?" That's a classic example of an application oriented message. It begins with people asking "What does this mean?" and it ended with people saying, "What shall we do?" The problem with many of our sermons - at the end of them people are still asking, "What does it mean?"

Tell them why and then show them how. Giving people a step by step procedure. Tell them, "Here's what we can do."

What are the best selling books out today? How-to books. How to keep your family together, How to handle a crisis, How to make your life more manageable... things like that. Sermons that teach people how to live will never lack an audience. Unfortunately a lot of preaching today is what I call, Ain't-it-awful preaching. Ain't it awful preaching is long on diagnosis and short on remedy. It's kind of like, "We're against this and we're against that" and it's kind of like Sin of the Week. "What are we going to be against this week? Isn't life bad?" They're always being negative.

When I go to a doctor, I don't want just a diagnosis. I want a cure. And a lot of preaching is just diagnosis: The world is bad. When I go to a doctor and say, "I'm not feeling good," and he says, "I know why you're not feeling good. You don't take care of yourself. You stay up too late. You eat too much. You have too much stress in your life. You don't exercise. One hundred dollars please!" But wait a minute! I didn't come just to have him tell me what's wrong with me. I want a solution. I want a remedy. I want to be healed. I want to be changed.

That's true when people come to church. They don't want to just hear what's wrong with them, what's wrong in the world. They want remedy.

As I told you, I grew up in a pastor's home and have heard a lot of sermons. I used to write "YBH" at the side of my Bible - "Yes, but how?" I'd hear a sermon that would say "Be filled with the Spirit!" Yes, but how? "Be a godly man." Yes, but how? "Put Jesus Christ at the center of your life." Sure, but how?

It is not enough to just say, "Christ is the answer." You've got to explain, first, what the question is. And second, you've got to explain how He's the answer to that question.

"He wrote to teach his people how to live - how to act in every circumstance"
Prov.1:2 (LB)

There is both a *personal* and *corporate* application in preaching.

Remember there's a corporate aspect of preaching and you want to mature the church and move it along and not just change individual lives. Rev. 2 reminds us that the Spirit has a message for the local church body.

***"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."
Rev. 2:11 (NIV)***

Pastor, you have to realize that the pulpit is the rudder that guides the direction of the church. The Spirit has something to say to your church. Not just to the individuals in your church, but also to your church as a whole.

2. MODEL IT FROM YOUR OWN LIFE.

Set the example by applying to yourself first!
Paul was the expert at this..

***"Now, brothers, I have APPLIED these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, 'Do not go beyond what is written.'"
1 Cor. 4:6 (NIV)***

3. ASK PENETRATING QUESTIONS.

Jesus did!

***"When Peter came into the house, Jesus was the first to speak. 'What do you think, Simon?' he asked. 'From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes--from their own sons or from others?'"
Matt. 17:25 (NIV)***

***"What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off?"
Matt. 18:12 (NIV)***

***"What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.'"
Matt. 21:28 (NIV)***

***"What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?"
Matt. 22:42 (NIV)***

***"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"
Luke 10:36 (NIV)***

***"Jesus answered, 'Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way?'"
Luke 13:2 (NIV)***

***"Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them--do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem?"
Luke 13:4 (NIV)***

ILL: I often include a self evaluation quiz on the outline. "Rate yourself"
A personal inventory

Self evaluation quiz / Personal inventory

4. GIVE SPECIFIC ACTION STEPS.

Show how it can be done
Believe this / Don't believe that
Do this / Don't do that
Remember this... Change that... Begin this...

5. GIVE PRACTICAL EXAMPLES.

Show how others have done it
This is the awesome power of Testimonies!

"The things that happened to those people are examples. They were written down to teach us..." 1 Cor. 10:11 (NCV)

The NT= book of instruction. The OT= book of illustration
(The OT illustrates every principle found in the NT)

6. OFFER PEOPLE HOPE.

People need encouragement to change.
If they think it is hopeless, they won't even try!

"Tell it like it could be"

The Bible is a book of hope!

"For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have HOPE." Rom. 15:4 (NIV)

7. MAKE YOUR APPLICATIONS YOUR POINTS!

I'll explain this in a minute.
This is the secret weapon for preaching for changed lives!

8. PUT A VERB IN EVERY POINT!

The easiest way to help people be "doers of the word" ...
This turns truth into action steps

What about when you just want them to *believe* something?
Use the verb *believe*!

9. PUT JESUS OR GOD IN THE POINT.

You not just giving some little moralistic pep talk.
The power to change comes from God.

EXAMPLE: 1 COR. 10:13
“Overcoming Temptation”

“No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”

WEAK	STRONGER
<i>You can overcome temptation</i>	<i>What to do when you're tempted</i>
1. Because it is common.	1. Believe God has seen it before.
2. Because it is limited.	2. Believe God will limit its intensity.
3. Because it is escapable.	3. Believe God will make a way out.

1st outline: encourages self-confidence
2nd outline: encourages trust in God.

10. PERSONALIZE THE POINTS BY USING PERSONAL PRONOUNS.
“You” “Me” “I”.

I rarely use “we” - It weakens the application.

Jesus came for me!
Jesus died for me!
Jesus is coming again for me!

ACADEMIC OUTLINE
“The Corinthians and Spiritual Gifts” (1 Cor. 12)
Point #1 –The Source of the Corinthians’ Gifts.
Point #2 –The Function of the Corinthians’ Gifts.
Point #3 –The Purpose of the Corinthians’ Gifts.

Sermon Books are filled with this kind of outline.
But it isn't a *preaching* outline! It is a *lecturing* outline!

What's *wrong* with this outline?

- It is **ABSTRACT.**
- It is **IN THE THIRD PERSON.**
- It is **PAST TENSE.**
- It is not about either **GOD OR PEOPLE.**

When you preach the Bible in an *impersonal* way- you remove all the power!

If you use that kind of an outline -your preaching has to be *in spite of the outline!*
It's “Oh, by the way, *this is how it relates to you.*”

Remember: the purpose of preaching is to bring God & people together.

It is easy to be abstract. It takes more thinking to be specific & personal.

A LIFE-CHANGING OUTLINE
"Using Your Gifts" (1 Cor. 12)
Point #1 – God Gave You Gifts
Point #2 – God Gave You Gifts to Use
Point #3 – God Gives You Gifts for the Benefit of the Body

What's *right* about this outline?

- It is **PERSONAL.**
- It is **PRACTICAL.**
- It is **GOD-CENTERED.**
-

ACADEMIC OUTLINE

"A More Excellent Way" (1 Cor. 13)
by J.T. Crabtree (1983 Preacher's Annual)
Point #1 – Its Ministry of Healing
Point #2 – Its Simplicity of Language
Point #3 – Its Competency for Problem Solving
Point #4 – Its Superiority of Value

Q: Doesn't this really warm your heart?
Could you preach those points with passion?

What a way to treat the world changing subject of love!

What's *wrong* with this outline?

(same as above)

Also...

- It uses **COMPLEX LANGUAGE.**
- It uses **INCOMPLETE SENTENCES.**
- It is **PASSIVE.**

I don't know how we can take such *warm, passionate truths*
& teach them in such sterile, scholastic formats!

It's no wonder ...churches don't grow and lives aren't changed!
... people go to sleep in church!
...people think church to be the most boring place to be

WHAT'S WORSE: This guys church must be *dying*

and yet he *thinks* he's being faithful!

A LIFE-CHANGING OUTLINE
“How Your Love Can Change Others” (same points rephrased)

- 1. Your Love Heals!**
- 2. Your Love Speaks!**

(Your love speaks volumes, far louder than words. You've heard the old saying, “People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.” When they won't listen to anything else, they'll listen to your love.)

3. Your Love Can Solve Problems!

Can love overcome all kinds of difficulties? Sure it can.

4. Your Love Is of Great Value!

Can you see how much better that is? It's personal, it's practical, it's positive. You could make it even more powerful by turning it into action statements.

“The way I approach a sermon has changed. I used to concentrate on what the text says ...how I could make it mean something to somebody else. Now I ask, What does God want these people to hear? My preaching was academic; now it's more personal... Everybody I talk to carries some pain. Woe to that church that doesn't recognize people's needs...” Warren Wiersbe (After 40 years of preaching)

Promise me that never again you'll preach an academic outline! Never take God's word and make it that boring again! We take the most exciting book in the world and bore people to tears with it by turning it into this academic structure. You need to be personal, practical and positive.

11. SUGGEST A PRACTICAL ASSIGNMENT.

“Go and do likewise.” Luke 10:37

At Saddleback we often will assign some homework. Jesus did this a lot. He gave assignments. He'd say, “Go and do likewise.” Last January when I was doing this two-week series on finances, my homework was, Write out a practical budget for the year. We actually gave them some tools and took two Wednesday nights to do a little workshop to teach people to put feet to what they'd been hearing about. It's not enough to just say, “Get out of debt!” It's not enough just to give them God's principles. You need to show them how and what to do. What are the steps of getting out of debt? You give practical assignments.

SMART Assignments are

S SPECIFIC

The words “more” and “less” are not specific enough. You need to say, “I'm going to do ‘this’ by ‘this’ date.”

M MOTIVATIONAL

Does the assignment motivate me? If it's something not motivating don't even suggest it, otherwise they're not going to do it anyway.

A ATTAINABLE

You don't give them an assignment that's unrealistic. Unrealistic assignments just discourage people.

R RELEVANT

Is it based on the message? Is it based on my values and priorities?

T TRACKABLE

Can I measure my progress?

These are some steps that you can do to apply the scripture in a practical way.

Here is what I am saying?

We need less "OUGHT-TO" preaching and more "HOW-TO" preaching!

I love this verse in Proverbs 11:20 (New Century)

***"The wise person teaches others how to live."* Pr.11:20 (NCV)**

Do you want to be a wise person? Here's how to do it. Wise teachers, wise preachers teach how to live – that's skills.

"Since this is the kind of life we have chosen, the life of the Spirit, let us make sure that we do not just hold it as an idea in our heads or a sentiment in our hearts, but **WORK OUT ITS IMPLICATIONS in every detail of our lives." Galatians 5:25 (MsgB)**

What is the most practical way to say it. How can I say it so that people become doers of the Word.

And then I ask a fourth question:

IV. WHAT IS THE MOST POSITIVE WAY TO SAY IT?

After I've looked for the practical I ask what is the most positive way to say it. Proverbs 16:21

"A wise, mature person is known for his understanding. The more pleasant his words, the more persuasive he is." Prov. 16:21 (GN)

Circle “pleasant” and “persuasive” and draw a line between the two. Those go together. If you want to be persuasive, you have to be pleasant. So you ask, What is the most positive way to say it?

The point is, when I'm abrasive I'm never persuasive. You attract more flies with honey than vinegar and if you want to help people change you don't scold them into changing. You use pleasant words.

This is really sad. The gospel has been communicated so many times in negative terms that it has developed a negative image. In fact, churches are known more for what they're against than for what they're for. Have you ever thought about that the terms “preach,” “preaching,” “sermon” are always used in a negative term in our society. People say, “Don't preach at me!... Don't give me a sermon!... I don't need any of your preaching!” They're always used in a negative sense. Why? Because unfortunately many times we've taken the most positive message in the world, the Gospel – the Good News – and communicated it in negative terms.

I'm going to give you a personal conviction. I personally believe that a constant diet of negative sermons is detrimental to the health of a church. I believe that! I'm not saying that you have to always be positive. I am *not* saying that! Sometimes you have to be negative. But I'm saying that a constant diet of negative messages is detrimental to the health of a church. And the most destructive kind of message is when the pastor has got a bunch of pent-up emotions and he's really upset and he comes out and kind of spiritually vomits on the people. After he's finished he feels good but we all go home a little sticky.

Have you ever wondered why some churches are filled with so many goofy people? There are some churches that are kook attractors. You find these people who are neurotic, who need a weekly spanking to feel good. And it's the preaching that sets them up. You preach negative, negative, negative... you know what you're going to attract when you preach negative? Negative people.

Positive people don't hang out where the message is negative all the time. They go to the church that's doing something, that's not against everything, that says, “Let's be for something, not against it!” Positive people don't hang out in a negative atmosphere. So if you're always preaching negative you get people who like to be spiritually spanked. And they come in, “Oh, great message, Pastor. It made me feel so bad!” Like I haven't really worshipped unless I'm run over by a biblical bulldozer.

The sad thing is I counsel a lot of pastors and guys don't realize how they're setting themselves up. They preach negative and “We're against ‘this’ this week and ‘that’,” negative, negative every week. And then they get a good idea and they present it at their church business meeting and it's voted down. And they wonder why. They set themselves up. They have trained their people to be negative. By their very own teaching, they have trained their people. Rather than saying, “Sure, let's go for it. Let's trust God and believe for miracles. Let's risk. Let's take steps of faith. Let's be risk takers for the glory of God.” They're going, “No, we can't do that. We're against everything.” You get a good idea and it gets voted down.

Negative sermons fill a church with: NEGATIVE PEOPLE

“Be tactful with those who are not Christians...Talk to them agreeably...” Col. 4:5-6 (JB)

Circle “agreeably”. That is “What is the most positive way to talk to an unbeliever?”

You’re not watering down the message. You’re just being polite.

Let me shock you: Do you know that Jesus never called anyone in the Bible a sinner? Look it up. I once read through all four gospels, not one place did Jesus call anybody a sinner. He did call Pharisees “white washed sepulchers” and Saducees “snakes and vipers”. He reserved all of His criticism for religious people who were putting down unchurched people and who were putting barriers up that the non believer couldn’t pass and which the so-called religious person couldn’t even keep themselves. So He focused all His anger on legalism not on the “sinner” because He lifted people up.

Jesus never tried to convert anyone with: ANGER

Not once. In fact, He said, *“I didn’t come to condemn the world. I came to save it.”* Do you want to be like Jesus? I do. If I’m going to be like Jesus, I don’t come to condemn the world. I come to save it – not me, but to point to the Savior.

Question: Does nagging work on you? Does nagging work in your home? Do you do it with a happy attitude? No. And if you nag people into serving Jesus they’ll do it with an unhappy attitude. Nagging does not work in your home. It does not work with your wife or your husband and it doesn’t work with your kids and it definitely doesn’t work in the pulpit. Criticism only makes you defensive. So when you nag and when you’re critical and you’re not positive you’re abrasive not persuasive, you don’t change anybody’s minds, you just make them defensive.

I could make everybody in this room defensive in about thirty seconds. All you have to do is say two or three very critical things about the people and you’ll have your defenses up thinking, “Who do you think you are? What right do you have to say that to me?” And the defenses will be up and the communication will stop.

Criticism is a lousy motivator. So in your preaching you don’t want criticism. You don’t want to be a nag. You want to be persuasive not abrasive.

Our basic message to the unchurched: GOOD NEWS

That’s what the gospel is all about. In fact that’s what “gospel” means – “Good news!” Even though sometimes when we’re trying to share the good news we just have to make people bad first so we think they’ll really see the good news.

I got this letter: A guy had seen that Saddleback in our early days, we used to do direct mail to get people interested in the church. We haven’t done it in a long time. He thought it was a great idea and he sent out a direct mail piece. He wrote this letter. This is a direct mail piece to get us to come to his church. “Dear friend, have you noticed all the many obstacles popping up these days to burden the American family? Real estate is increasing at an astronomical rate. And with interest rates sky rocketing it’s almost impossible for the average person to buy a home. [I’m starting to get depressed!] Prices are soaring in the area of groceries and gasoline and clothes. This creates problems and pressures at home. One out of three marriages ends in divorce. Kids are rebelling against their parents. And they’re experiencing things in life they have no business experiencing. [Right now I’m ready to slit my wrists!] The cares of this world along with the problems at work and at home seem to close in on us. Is it any surprise that the number one problem in our society is depression? [No, cause I’m reading your letter!!] You

might think that there is no one who cares or understands what you're going through. [I think he's going to get to something good?!?! But then he says...] When problems overwhelm us it's a natural inclination to turn to drugs, alcohol, even unfaithfulness to those we love the most in trying to forget what is going on around us. But these only bring more problems. Guilt, deeper depression, a sense of failure. We have two choices. One choice is our natural tendency to the above remedies – alcohol, etc, etc. The other choice is to turn to the one true God and let Him fill you with His joy, peace and love.” [By that time, I've committed suicide!]

Why didn't he start the letter with that line? What was he thinking? Does he really think the average unchurched person is going to open a letter and read three paragraphs about what's bad in the world before he gets to “the other choice is to turn to the one true God and let Him fill us with His joy, peace, and love.”

If you become a positive preacher one of the benefits is your sermons get shorter. I use to spend the first thirty minutes of the message working up guilt. Then once I got them guilty then, “Now, here's the Savior!”

When I used to work up guilt and kind of bail them out at the end, that's like a kid fishing on the side of the river and I walk from behind and push him in and then offer him a hand to help him out and expect him to thank me for it. I'm the one that pushed him in! I used to... such as a message on worry I'd say, “Look at what worry does to our society” and I'd give all these statistics on how bad worry was in our society. “Look at what worry does to our family” and I'd talk about how it messes up our families. “Look at what worry does to our churches... to your life... to your physical health.” I'd spend half the message talking about the negative part of worry.

Then I started watching how Jesus did it. In Jesus' classic passage in Matthew 6 He just gets up and says, “Here's why you don't need to worry” and He gives six reasons. So now what I do is say, “Isn't it a fact of life that we all worry? How many of you have worried this week? Today we're going to look at what Jesus said, six ways, six reasons we don't need to worry. Let's look at them.” *Bam!* You've just saved yourself a lot of time. You got right to the solution and you're dealing with what Jesus said in the text rather than “Look at what worry does in our society... to your health...”

A sermon does not have to be eternal to be immortal!

I discovered people already feel guilty. That's why they aren't in church in the first place. If you had fifty parking tickets you wouldn't wake up on Monday morning and say, “Let's go down to the courthouse and let the judge tell us what lousy drivers we are!” No! You don't want to go where you're reminded of all the places you've blown it. You don't have to make people feel guilty. They already are. What they're looking for is relief and the church that teaches people relief will have enormous benefits. They'll have enormous blessings and people will want to be there. Because they're looking for relief.

When I'm preparing a message, I ask two questions.

When preparing a message ask:

1. Is the MESSAGE Good News?

Because that's our basic message to the unchurched. When you're preparing an evangelistic message, Is the message good news? There's so much bad news in the world, the last thing

people need is to come to church and get more bad news. If you're going to give them bad news they can just stay at home and turn on the weekly news.

The other question I ask is,

2. Does my TITLE imply Good News?

Teaching Tip

There is a lot of humor in this section. You'll have to choose if it works in your setting or does not work. Many of these humorous titles are based on word plays or on rhymes that will not work if the seminar is being translated into another language.

One word of encouragement: if you're not great at humor don't feel that you have to try to do something that just does not work for you. God sent YOU to this group and He wants to use YOU, the person that you are, to make a difference in the lives of those you are teaching.

I have a crazy habit of collecting stupid sermon titles. I thought I'd read a few of them here today. Here's a copy of the *Los Angeles Times* and the Religion page. Tell me if they're good news and if this title would motivate you enough to want to come to church if you were a non Christian.

"The gathering storm: God's chosen ones" (sounds like a church fight to me)

1 John "Walking Instructions"

"No longer walking on the other side of the road" (the sin of jay-walking?)

"On the road to Jericho"

"Becoming a Titus"

"We hold to the plenary verbal inspiration, the mighty fortress church"

"The ministry of cracked pots" (a ceramic class?)

"A God-forsaken true believer and a benevolent heretic" (Howard Stern and Rush Limbaugh??)

"No such thing as a rubber clock"

Sometimes pastors try to form a question to create interest.

"What is more blessed?

"Are you pushing or pulling?

"Are we having fun yet?"

Sign on a Christian church: "Have you ever been to hell? Visit us."

"How to make a fish vomit." Then the Lord's Supper will be served.

"First the thunder, then the lightning"

"Getting neighborly with your personal demons"

"Come and be a part of our Seeker-Contemporary service. Tongan dance performed by Tongan youth."

Here are some of my all time favorite sermon illustrations:

"The destiny of the dead" Deacon ordination.

"What hell is like" Special music by our organist.
I remember MaMa. MaMa was a widow.
Old fashioned hell-fire preaching. Evangelist Glen Ice.

It's funny how some pastors treat the subject of sex.

"Why it's risky to be frisky."
"Why you need to purge the urge to merge"

Some pastors try to give cute titles to old Bible stories

"Seven dunks in a muddy river" (Naaman and Elisha)
"When lefty let fatty have it!" (Ehud the judge)
"A new dude in a rude mood" (Gadarene demonic)

Some pastors really go for bizarro titles

"Resurrected brains of the unsaved dead"
"A hooker and two preachers"
"Fed up at fifteen; fagged out at forty"

Sometimes the morning title is ruined by the evening service title when they put them out on billboards:

A.M. "The Preacher preaches" ... P.M. "What the fool said"
A.M. "Short beds and narrow blankets"... P.M. "Great expectations"
A.M. "Ten virgins in a crisis"... P.M. "I am only one man, so what?" (I'm assuming his text was Philippians 4:13 "*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!*")

You've got to look at your sermon title. If it's not clear and captivating why give it a title? If you want some good sermon titles get some tape catalogs and look through them.

Ephesians 4:29

"Do not use harmful words in talking but only helpful words, the kind that build up..."

Eph. 4:29a (GN)

You want to say it in the most positive way.

How do you preach against sin in a positive way?

How to preach against sin in a positive way: PROMOTE THE RIGHTEOUS ALTERNATIVE

In other words, be *for* the right thing instead of always *against* the wrong thing. I don't preach *against* adultery as much as I preach *for* faithfulness. I don't preach *against* dishonesty as much as I preach *for* integrity. I don't preach *against* lack of commitment as much as I preach

for the value of commitment. And I don't preach *against* sin as much as I preach *for* righteousness.

James says about temptation whatever gets your attention gets you. What you have to do to break a temptation is not resist the temptation. Do you know that not once in scripture does it say resist temptation? It says resist the temptor. Big difference. The more you resist something, the more you fight it, the more you resist, the more it persists. The harder I push the harder you push back. It's a phenomena of life. We naturally push back to things that are pushed on us. So when I'm trying to resist a bad idea, the more I think about that bad idea, the more I'm actually drawn to that bad idea. The key to overcoming temptation is not to resist. Like there's a plate of chocolate chip cookies here: "I don't want those cookies, I don't want those cookies..." The whole time it's got my attention. Whatever's got my attention has got me in its grasp. The key is not to resist saying, "I don't want it." Because I really do want it. Instead, the key is to refocus, to turn my back, re-channel myself, flip the channels. I don't have the television on and saying, "I don't want to look at that..." No, I just flip channels.

So if you want to get people to break out of sin and break toward righteousness, you hold up the banner of righteousness. Hold up what it's like. Let people move toward that. Preach *for* the right thing rather than always being *against* the wrong thing.

Sometime it's just a simple changing of a word. For instance: When I used to do full time evangelism before starting Saddleback, I had a message called "Why we have no revival" and the message was something like "We work without priority, We walk without purity, We worship without passion, We warfare without power" – something like that. It's a negative message.

I took that message and changed one word and instead of saying why we don't have revival I made it, "How do we have revival? ... To have revival We must walk with purity, We must worship with passion, We must work with priority, We must warfare with power." It's the exact same sermon. It's just in the way you said it. You can say it negatively or you can say it positively. Have I watered down the message? No. Have I compromised the truth? No. Have I become some positive thinking salesman? No. It's the exact same message. I'm just saying it in a more persuasive way. Because it's a more pleasant way. And it doesn't make people defensive. "You're not doing this... you're not doing this..." Instead it's "You want revival in the church? Let's do this... let's do this..." That's what it means to make the shift from primarily a negative preacher to primarily a positive preacher in order to be persuasive. Because, as I said, negative churches are filled by negative preaching.

By the way, when people come to you and say, "Why don't you preach more on sin?" they don't mean their sin. Their sin of gossip, their sin of pride, their sin of gluttony, their sin of self righteousness... No, they mean preach on all those evil, wicked, mean, bad and nasty sins that I don't commit so I will feel morally superior to all those really bad people out there. That's what they're saying. They don't want you to preach on their sin. They want you to preach on other people's sin so they can feel morally superior. Preaching against sin is not preaching the good news. The good news is the gospel. "*All have sinned...*" That's not the good news. That's not even news! I've never met anybody in my life that claimed to be perfect. I doubt you have either. I've never met anybody who claimed "I've never sinned." So it's not really like you have to convince people that they've sinned. I don't measure up to my own standards, much less God's. And neither does anybody else.

The good news is not "You have sinned". The good news is you can be forgiven. Your slate can be wiped clean. You can be washed clean by what Jesus Christ has done for you.

You say, “Do you preach repentance?” Of course I do. But repentance is not a negative term but it is the most positive term there is. That’s the message of the New Testament, to change your mind. When I repented I turned from darkness to light. I turned from guilt and shame to forgiveness. I turned from meaninglessness and lack of purpose in life to real meaning and real purpose in life. I turned from certain condemnation and hell to heaven and eternal life. I turned from misery to hope. For me, repentance was the most positive thing I ever did in my life. If I had known the benefits of what it meant to follow Christ, I would have done it years earlier. And so would many other people. Sometimes we act like repentance is trying to give people cancer. We’re saying, “Would you like to have your past forgiven, a purpose for living and a home in heaven?” What’s wrong with that? Who’s going to turn that down? Repentance is the most positive change a person can make. So why preach on it in a negative way? Turn away from selfishness and turn to unselfishness. Turn away from a life without God to a life with God. Turn away from a life controlled by my own passions to a life of self-control. What is so bad about that? That’s a wonderful change. How can we take the most positive message in the world and make people feel like we’re trying to give them cancer? The happiest day of my life was the day I repented.

How do you motivate people to repent? Simple. Explain the benefits. *“If I be lifted up I will draw all men unto Me.”* The fact is repentance brings relief. And the whole world is looking for relief. Relief from guilt, relief from fear, relief from condemnation, relief from self-centeredness – all those different things. So you preach it in a positive way.

You say, “How do you preach on a negative passage in Scripture?”

How to preach on negative passages: WITH A HUMBLE, LOVING ATTITUDE.

In the first place, you don’t preach it like you’re superior to them, your hearers – “We’re all in the same boat.” You confess, “I’ve fallen short here too.” You change your pronouns and talk about “we”. You talk about “us”. Instead of “you”. When you preach on hell you preach on it with a broken heart, not like “Goody! Somebody’s going to go there!” Or like you’re really happy somebody’s going to go there. Your heart should be breaking when you think of hell! And they should feel your passion and your love and that you’ll do anything you can to keep them out of hell because Jesus did. To go to hell you’ve got to do almost the impossible. You’ve got to reject the love of God, a God who spread out His arms on the cross and said, “I love you this much.” To go to hell you have to say, “No. I don’t want that.” You preach on it with a broken heart. The Bible says *“The Lord is not willing that any should perish.”* God doesn’t want people to go to hell. I don’t want people to go to hell. When I preach on hell I’m saying I don’t want you to go to hell, Here’s how you can go to heaven.

How would you imagine Jesus quoting Romans 3:23? Do you think He’d say it with anger in His voice? With ego in His voice? With gladness in His voice? I don’t think so. But with resignation of the fact of reality that nobody’s perfect, that everybody’s fallen short. We’ve all blown it. We’ve all sinned. None of us can say I’ve battled 1000 my entire life. None of us! We’re all in the same boat.

But the good news is we have the grace of God. So you don’t take joy in the negative passages of scripture.

I love to preach positive messages on negative passages. I find it an intellectual challenge to take negative passages of scripture and preach on them in a positive way. I enjoy doing it. I once asked our people, “What’s the most negative passages of scripture you know?” Most of the people said The Ten Commandments – *“Thou shalt not... Thou shalt not...”* so I preached a

series on the Ten Commandments. In fact, I've preached through the Ten Commandments three times in twenty years in a positive way.

The first series I did on the Ten Commandments I called it "Ten Steps to the Good Life" and another time I called it "Playing By the Rules" and another time "Building My Life on Values That Last." In the first series, these were the sermon titles: "How to set your priorities" (*Thou shalt not have any other gods before Me; Thou shalt not make any graven images* "How to Get to Know the Real God"; *Don't take My name in vain* "How Do you Take God Seriously"; *Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy* "How to Prevent Burnout" Why? Because Jesus said, "*Man wasn't made for the Sabbath but the Sabbath for man.*" God created the Sabbath for our benefit. It's not for His benefit. God knows every seventh day after six days of work you need to take a day off.

By the way, what's your day off every week that you never let get taken away from you? Pastor, if you're not taking a day off every week you're breaking one of the Ten Commandments. Rest and recreation are so essential to ministry and to life that God put it in the Big Ten right there with Don't Commit Adultery. I know you would never think of committing adultery, but many of you are violating the fourth commandment on a weekly basis. Sunday is certainly not a day of rest for you. It's a workday. I take Monday's off. I don't like taking Monday's off because I don't like feeling that bad on my day off. In fact, I usually don't believe in God before 11:00 a.m. on Monday mornings. After five services you're just kind of a puddle.

Then "*Honor your father and mother*" I called "How to make peace with your parents" Why? Because a lot of people are going, "Me honor my dad? He molested me.... Me honor my mom? She moved out on me. She divorced and left me with dad." You have to deal with those issues. Then *Thou shalt not kill* I called "How to tame your temper". Why? Because Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount if you call a guy a fool and get angry at him it's just like killing him. Jesus took it the next step. *Thou shalt not commit adultery* I called "How to affair proof your marriage". The world, even the most pagan person, knows that adultery is wrong. So you want to say, "How? How do I stop that from happening in my family? How do I build up the parameters, the hedges that keep my marriage pure?" *Thou shalt not steal*, I talked about "How to prosper with a clear conscious." The Bible says there are legitimate ways to make money and there are illegitimate ways to make money and we cover those. There are many ways to steal. Then "How to be respected by others" and "How to find lasting contentment" – I talked about coveting.

So I'm taking negative passages and preaching on them in a positive way. I did a series on "The Seven Deadly Sins" to seekers in seven weeks and they were eating it up. Why? Preaching it in a positive way, dealing with it in the right way.

I went through the whole book of Ecclesiastes and if you want a downer book... we actually had to stop the scripture reading because people were getting up before we actually got to the explanation.

The way you say it determines the way it is received. And if you say it offensively it will be received defensively. So I want to beg you to work on being a more positive preacher. Work on being a more pleasant preacher. Any fool can be negative – just read the newspapers. It takes no brains at all to be a critic. Have you noticed that they never build statues to critics? All the statues are built toward people who all their lives were criticized but they never built the statue to the critic. It takes character to be positive. Any fool can be negative. Any fool can be sarcastic, cynical, and against everything. It takes real character to be positive. "*Shining as a bright light in a dark world. Do all things without grumbling and disputing that you may be harmless and blameless without reproach, without rebuke. In the midst of a crooked and*

perverse nation among whom you shine as lights in the world.” God says positive people are so rare in a perverse and crooked world, that they shine like bright stars in the dark night.

Do you want to be that kind of person in your community? Be positive. Stop being negative.

V. WHAT IS THE MOST ENCOURAGING WAY TO SAY IT?

Look at these verses:

“A word of encouragement does wonders!” Prov. 12:25 (LB)

***“Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures, we might have hope.”
Rom. 15:4 (NIV)***

The Bible says that everything in the Bible, everything that was written was written for our encouragement, even the negative passages.

Every week, those who listen to your messages have three fundamental needs.

Three Fundamental Needs of People

- **To have their faith reinforced**
- **To have their hope renewed**
- **To have their love restored**

It's not a sin to help people feel good!

When you stand before your congregation and you realize they've had a tough week your job is to encourage them to not give up. If you preach to broken hearts you will always be relevant because everybody's hurting somewhere.

We all need affirmation and we all need encouragement and Jesus' preaching always brought out the best in people. He lifted people up. This is the key to encouraging personal change. It's so important here.

**The Key To Encouraging Personal Change:
Don't tell it like it is.**

Instead tell it LIKE IT CAN BE!

That is preaching for faith. That is preaching for encouragement. Don't tell it like it is. Labeling just reinforces what we are. If you go out and tell people they're bad they'll say "Let me show you how bad I am!" If you come up to me and say, "Rick, you are a lousy dad!" My tendency would be to say, "I am a lousy dad. Let me think of all the ways I'm a lousy dad." And you reinforce what I already am. On the other hand if you were to say, "Rick, I see in you the potential to become an outstanding father with God's grace in your life and the Holy Spirit

empowering you and the word of God leading and guiding you, you could become the kind of man that your wife would adore, that your children would respect and honor, that the community would hold up as a man of integrity and you would be trusted and respected. I see in you the potential to become a great, great father!" That motivates me. Telling me what I am does not motivate me. Telling me what I can be is preaching for faith and preaching for faith is always better than preaching for criticism. Don't tell it like it is. What's better is to tell it like it could be. Preaching for faith – "This is what God can do in your life... This is the difference Jesus can make..."

How do you fight a bad idea? Offer a better one. I know people say, "I'm called to be a prophet!" and they think that means condemn and criticize. Read your Old Testament. Those prophets did an awful lot of comforting too. Even the prophets are supposed to encourage.

DEFINITION OF PROPHECY:

"Everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement, and comfort." 1 Cor. 14:3

"Prophecy is for edification, education and comfort." I don't see any criticism in it. Build up, hold up, fire up!

I saw a cartoon a while back. Dennis the Menace is standing with his folks as they're going outside of church and he says to the pastor, "Hey Rev! Next Sunday just for fun could you tell us what we're doing right?"

I got this flyer in the mail called "Jesus is Coming Revival of Repentance – non denominational fearless attack against sin and worldliness. Read the back side." So I turned it over "Read what the prophet says..." and there are 43 things that this guy's against and he's listed them all. "I will be preaching against... adultery, divorce, remarriage, marriage annulment, fornication, common law living, oral sex, lusting, homosexuality, lesbianism, pimps, pornography, mixed bathing, women wearing shorts, hatred, stealing, cheating, lying, deceiving, gambling, using God's name in vain, dope addiction, alcoholic beverages, tobacco use, smoking, pride, makeup, certain television programs, suicide, murder, rape, bribery, extortion, arson, mini skirts, revenge, rock music and all the rest that the Bible condemns." The last line of his advertisement says "And if you want to know what the Holy Ghost said concerning television sets He says, 'Move them out!'" and then he closes it, "Love, in Jesus' name..."

A lot of so-called "courageous" preaching is really just obnoxious preaching.

You can state the truth in a courteous way. Jesus reserved only His criticism for the condemnation of the Pharisees who were legalistic in putting down the unbelievers. In Matthew 23:4 He had talked about the impossible demands on people that even they themselves can't keep.

"(Pharisees) pile up back-breaking burdens and lay them on other men's shoulders."
Matt. 23:4 (Ph)

ENCOURAGE PEOPLE IN YOUR INTRODUCTION AND YOUR CONCLUSION!

To encourage people, make sure that you start encouraging and you end with encouragement. In your introduction you want to encourage people that they can change, and in your conclusion you want to encourage them to make a commitment to change.

Teaching Tip

There is a good deal of material in this session, and sometimes it can run long! If you feel that you're running long, don't teach every sub-point in the session. For instance, you could refer to 3 or 4 of the bullet points quickly. Or you might want to say, "And here are 7 or 8 ideas for doing that." We've included all of this material for the learner's benefit, but much of it is self-explanatory. Don't feel that you have to do an in depth exegesis of every sub-point!

A well-prepared meal is you have an appetizer and you have a meal and you have a desert. In a well prepared message you have an appetizer and you have a meal and you have a desert. Or preaching is like flying a plane. You've got to have a take off and you've got to have a landing. The flight may be as smooth as all get out but if you don't land well it isn't going to work. You may have a great take off, you may have a great illustration, a great introduction but if you don't land well you've got a problem.

4 PURPOSES OF AN INTRODUCTION

During the sermon preparation I type all my ideas for my introduction at the top of the document but I rarely write the introduction until the message is finished. I'm just throwing ideas up at the top of the document. But it's the second to the last thing I write.

There are four purposes to an introduction. If you don't match these purposes you don't even need an introduction.

1. To CONNECT WITH YOUR AUDIENCE.

That's your first task. You've got to identify with them, establish rapport, establish a relationship before you can get a response.

You must establish a RELATIONSHIP before you can get a RESPONSE.

Relationship comes before response. That's the first purpose. You want to make connection with the people you're speaking to.

2. To GAIN ATTENTION.

You want to arouse curiosity. You want to whet their appetite. In the first three minutes people either tune in or they tune out. One way or the other.

I was watching a Star Trek rerun the other day and you know the famous words of Piccard "Engage!" That's the purpose of an introduction. You want to engage the minds, engage the emotions, engage them into things so you draw them in through a connecting rhythm.

3. To INTRODUCE THE PURPOSE OF THE MESSAGE.

If the sermon is a bridge (we talked about that yesterday) then the introduction is the bridge to the bridge. You're getting the purpose right up at the front.

4. To answer the question "WHY SHOULD I LISTEN?"

A good introduction has two things: brevity and variety. Brevity – it's not too long. You don't waste precious minutes on a long introduction. That's a big mistake we often make. We get way too long in the introduction. And it also needs variety. Never start the same way every week. Like you get up and say the same little ritual going into your message.

Sometimes you can use a quote for an introduction. Sometimes you can use a question for an introduction. You can use a shocking statement. You can use an object lesson. You can use a humorous story. These are all different, possible introductions.

My two favorite ways to introduce a message:

1. I love to use a funny news item that relates to whatever I'm talking about. Like some of the news items you'd see on Jay Leno or somewhere like that. You find a news item that fits where you're headed and yet there's something humorous about it.
2. The other way I like to introduce a message is through a personal life situation that's common to everybody. I start telling a story that everybody starts nodding to – "I've been there! I know what you're talking about!"

Let me give you three things to avoid in an introduction.

1. Elaborate greetings. Don't use your introduction to respond to introductions. Somebody gets up and says, "Here's the Right Reverend So and So for Such and Such and he's done this and that," and then you get up and feel obligated to throw the baloney back on them: "It's so wonderful and so gracious to be here and I'm honored...." When guys do those kind of introductions it's kind of like the old Peanuts cartoon on TV: "WaaWaa, Waa WaaWaa, WaaWaa..." You're not even listening to it. It's worthless. Don't respond to greetings. Don't spend time trying to make political points with people in elaborate greetings.
2. Never begin a sermon with an apology. "I'm really sorry! I didn't have a whole lot of time this week to prepare!" They say, "That's ok. We don't have any time to listen!" Click!
3. Totally unrelated humor. Something that has no basis or no connection to where you're going. One of the worse things is just get up and tell a joke that has no connection to where you're going. Amateurs do that. Amateur speakers tell jokes that are unrelated to where they're headed.

Tie your introduction to your purpose.

CLOSE WITH A CALL TO PERSONAL COMMITMENT

The most encouraging thing you can do in a message is to make a call for personal commitment. Close with a call for people to do something based on the truth of God's word. When you read great preaching masters many of them are weak in this area – conclusions. Their sermons don't press for a verdict. Even some of the greatest preaches of all times when you read their sermons and get to the end they kind of trail off. They just don't know how to draw the net. They just don't know how to press for a decision, to challenge the will, to appeal for a verdict, to call to Christ. Maybe they even feel a little uncomfortable about it.

More pastors fail in this area of the message than almost any other area. They may have great content but then they get to the end and the message just kind of trails off to "Let's close in prayer." Even guys who know how to do great introductions often don't know how to do great endings. This is an area that I spend a lot of time on. A sermon without a conclusion has no purpose. You're still out there! In golf you may be very powerful in driving off from the tee but if you can't putt and sink the ball in the hole at the end, all that's for nothing. Like they say: Drive for show and putt for dough. If you can't sink it in the last minute then what are you playing the game for? Changed lives come from great conclusions.

Some preachers kind of remind me of pilots making practice landings. It's like you think they're going to land but they don't and they're back out again. Again and again. And you're going, "Land that thing! Get it on the ground!" Changed lives come from great conclusions. Let me give you some mistakes to avoid in your conclusion and calling for commitment.

MISTAKES TO AVOID

1. Don't JUST SUMMARIZE YOUR MESSAGE.

That is the most common mistake that preachers make with their conclusion. They go back and review and rehash and summarize. Your conclusion is much, much more than a summation. It should ask people to act on your application. You're not just summarizing the message in your conclusion. You're asking people to act on the application.

I love what John Stott says, "If there is no summons there is no sermon." You must challenge and call people to action. Don't just summarize the message.

2. Don't say "*In conclusion*" UNLESS YOU MEAN IT!

That's those practice landings. You keep circling the airstrip until you drop out of the sky. A lot of guys do that. They just run out of gas and they end. And the sermon nose dives.

3. Don't blame THE CLOCK FOR NEEDING TO CONCLUDE.

In other words, don't use that for your reason, "I see our time's up so let's close our Bibles and pray." That's the worst kind of ending. You're saying, "We've got something more important to do now so let's just shut it down." You're basically saying, "What I'm saying is not important. It's not life changing. What's more important is whatever you've got next." Every time you refer to the clock you're saying, "Whatever you've got next is more important." Is that the impression you want to give to people about God's word?

4. Don't INTRODUCE ANYTHING NEW IN YOUR CONCLUSION.

Sometimes you get to the end and you get the most brilliant idea. You're tempted to throw it in. Don't. And don't add a fourth or fifth point that you wished you'd said but forgot in the sermon. I've done that and it always bombs. You remember something and you throw it in. It just doesn't fit. Your conclusion is your summoning people to action. *Don't add a fourth or fifth point that you wish you had said in the sermon.*

5. Don't **OVEREXTEND** the invitation.

Pressure becomes counter-productive and becomes a battle of the wills. Have you ever been in a service that the pastor knows there's one person who still needs to receive Christ and he's going, "Let's just sing one more verse," and the guy with the white knuckles on the back row is thinking, "Let's just wait out one more verse."

Pressuring people actually hardens the heart. If the fruit is ripe you don't have to yank it. If the fruit is green, they're not ready yet. Don't force a decision. We say give people the time to make the right decision. Think about this when you're asking people to give their lives to Christ, you're asking them to make the most important decision in their life on the basis often on one 30 or 40 minute message. That's asking a lot. Here's a 40 year old guy who's been living one way his entire life and on the basis of one 30 or 40 minute message you're saying "I want you to change every direction you've been headed and go in a totally different direction." That is really pretty presumptuous. You probably didn't receive Christ the first time you heard about Him. People often just need time to think about it. It's the most important decision in their lives. Actually pressuring people to make a decision before they've had time to think about it is counter-productive and hardens the heart rather than softens it.

So for that reason we don't draw the net forcefully every single week. We always give the sinner's prayer and call to commitment every week, but I wait about every three or four weeks, depending on when I find the right message, that's when I really draw the net.

If you were to go to a grocery store to get a carton of milk and every time you went to just get milk people forced you to buy steak, would you keep going to that grocery store? No. You go in and say, "I'm here to buy milk," *No! You must buy milk.* "I'm just here for milk." *Today is the day for steak. Now is the accepted time for steak. You must buy steak. If you don't eat it tonight you may never eat steak again.* "I just came for milk!" *You must buy steak today because it might not be on sale tomorrow!* The guy goes, "Forget it! I'm not going back. All I came for was milk."

And by the way, if you haven't been to the Purpose Driven Church seminar get the tapes of the whole seminar and particularly listen to the sessions on how to build a service that attracts unbelievers. We go into a lot more detail than just the preaching element.

When you build a service to attract unbelievers you're going to get people who need to come, sit, think about it for a while and then come to Christ. So what I do is we don't force people to make a decision every week but we wait and at the right time every three or four weeks we draw the net in.

What that has done is drive the people at New Believer table batty. We'll have a couple people saved, a couple people saved, then fifty people saved on one day! Then a couple people saved, then a couple people saved, then twenty-five people come to Christ. It's like feast or famine. We actually get more people into the family of God by alternating rather than giving a hard sell every single week.

It's just a matter of time. We believe if they keep coming back the Holy Spirit is going to melt their heart and if they keep coming to Saddleback on a regular basis it is inevitable they're going to find Christ. We feel that confident about God's word.

6. Don't create ARTIFICIAL BARRIERS.

Like "If you want to be saved walk the aisle." That really becomes a form of works. A lot of people are ready to receive Christ. They're just naturally shy and it takes them a year to get courage to walk forward. They could have received Christ a long time ago if you'd used a decision card, then you could help them get growing and go ahead and help them make their public profession of faith their baptism.

What should you do instead of these things?

WHAT TO DO

1. Always offer an opportunity to RECEIVE CHRIST

No matter what you preach on, you close with the focus on Jesus Christ. That is so important. Spurgeon used to say, "Regardless of what text you began with you end with John 3:16." No matter what you start with you end with Christ. You point back to Jesus because He is our focus. He is our life.

Let me give you a little of my background. When I started Saddleback church I had already been involved in full time evangelism and in every one of those crusades or revivals that I had done I had given a Billy Graham style, come to the front altar calls. I'm Southern Baptist and that's what I'm trained in doing so it's very easy for me to say, let's sing "Just as I Am" and thousands of you will come forward and the busses will wait!

I'd always given a come-forward invitation so when I started Saddleback church I had every intention of simply having an altar call at the end of each service. I have nothing against altar calls. I think God uses them very effectively. But at the end of the very first service at Saddleback church I looked out and the auditorium was a high school theater and all the seats were welded together so there was no center aisle for people to come down. I saw two things. They'd have to say, "Excuse me.. Excuse me....." to get to the side of the chairs and walk around and with the doors open they'd have to walk outside and come back in and walk down to the front.

And then I noticed right in front of the pulpit was an orchestra pit. So I'm going to say, "I'm going to ask thousands of you to come down and jump in the pit!" I got to the end of my first message and hadn't thought this through and looked out – no aisle, orchestra pit. This isn't going to work! My first reaction was "Oh, God! How can anybody get saved? There's no place to come forward to."

I want to remind you that Jesus never said you had to walk from Point A to Point B in a church to become a believer. In fact they gave no come forward, down the aisle altar calls for the first three hundred years of the church because they didn't even have church buildings for the first three hundred years of the church, so there obviously weren't any aisles to walk down. The come forward invitation is a method that's only about 180 years old. It was invented by Methodist churches in the late 17th century and later picked up and popularized by Charles Finney in the mid 1800s - and the majority of evangelical churches use that form today. There's

nothing wrong with it. It's just not necessarily a biblical commandment. It just happens to be a method that was used frequently for the last 200 years.

My first reaction was how am I going to get people to make a commitment to Christ if there's no place for them to come forward to. So we experimented over the next several months with several different kinds of alternatives.

First we tried a counseling room. I'd lead the prayer of commitment then I'd say, "If you prayed that prayer I want you to go to the counseling room." I discovered two things: One, don't call it a counseling room, because when you say "counseling" they think "shrink", "psychiatrist." Second, we found that people would walk out and just keep on walking. They'd say, "I trust Rick and I know what's going on in here but I don't know what they're doing in that room over there!" It scared them and we found that just didn't work.

We tried all different kinds of things. Finally we came up with the idea of using the commitment card. Actually it's the registration card that we've been using for years. It has the registration on the front on which everybody registers every week. On the back, we've turned it into a decision card where people can check, "I'm committing my life to Christ, I want to be baptized, I'm renewing my commitment to Christ, enroll me in class 101 for membership or 201 for maturity or 301 for ministry or 401 for mission, I'm willing to help where needed" and other stuff and a place to write prayer requests. So we began to develop this as the alternative and it works so well that even after we got a building where we could have a come forward invitation and could have people coming down the aisles we stayed with this. (Example of Card included on POWERPOINT.)

Thousands and thousands of people have come to Christ just using this card. For a long time I'd say if you don't have a pencil to check the box but you've filled out the front earlier and you don't want to borrow a pen because everybody's praying at this time, just fold the card, put a crease in it. The crease says, Pastor I prayed that prayer and I'm giving my life to Christ today." Any folded card would come to me and I'd know they made that decision.

We tried all these different experiences but this has worked so well we now often do an invitation in reverse. We have a table outside called the Fresh Start With God table which is a new believer table and at the close of the service what I do is say "Let's bow our heads in prayer," and I draw the message to the conclusion and have them bow their heads in prayer and I always lead in a sinner's prayer. I always tell them what to pray. I say, "It doesn't matter what you say and if you don't know what to say you might say something like this. Just pray, 'Dear God [and you pause] I want to get to know You.'"

Here's a problem. When you say a prayer don't say it too fast. Many times they don't have enough time to think about it. So take it slow so they can ponder the meaning of every phrase. Lead in a prayer of commitment. When we finish everybody looks up and I say, "If you prayed that prayer congratulations. It's a wonderful decision." I explain a little about follow up and say, "You don't understand it all but we want to help you with your decision. Let's all take out these cards which we filled out earlier and in a minute we're going to give our offerings. If you're visiting here today please understand the offering is not meant for you. This is only for members. We want you to get something - not feel like you have to give. If you'll drop your card in the basket I'll appreciate it. We're not going to put you on any junk mail list but I would like to send you a note to say thanks for coming."

So everybody fills these out and we all put the cards in whether you made a decision or not, everybody puts them all in at the same time. I say "I have a packet of material I want to give you. It's a Bible and a tape and some other material that will help you get started in the decision

you just made when you prayed that prayer. I'll give you that packet if you'll let me know about your decision. There's two ways you can do it. One, you can take the card, check on the back 'I committed my life to Christ.' When the offering basket comes, toss that in and I'll mail you the package. If you're in a hurry and you want to get it right now, take this card after the service is over, walk out on the patio and hand it to the guys at the Fresh Start With God table. You don't have to say anything. You don't have to make any speech. Just hand them the card and they'll know that you gave your life to Christ, that you prayed that prayer and they'll give you the packet." Then what you do you put your best New Believer counselors at the table.

What have I done? I've just done an invitation in reverse. Instead of having them come to the front where they're standing in front of everybody and talking about the most important thing in their life when they're still unsure and scared, I'm having them go out to the back and talk to somebody on the patio. It's not in a room. They're not afraid. They can walk away at any moment. It's less threatening and more psychologically sound.

By using this method we have found so many, many people come to Christ. Most people who make their decision for Christ will do it the first or second time they come to Saddleback. Why? because it's so easy to make a decision for Christ, to say "Yes I want to follow Christ as much as I know how."

You say, "If you don't have them come forward where is their public profession of faith?" That's what baptism is. In the New Testament baptism is the public profession of faith. Sometimes today we have so overemphasized an altar call that baptism is almost anticlimactic. We don't make a big deal about them having to "come forward". We make a big deal about their baptism. That's when they're saying to the whole world, "I'm not ashamed to say I'm a believer." And it's after they've already committed to Christ. We never ask them to make a public decision until they've already done it in their heart. So you don't want to say, "If you want to receive Christ come forward right now." Jesus never said that. You're putting a rule that Jesus never made. He didn't say you have to come forward to receive Christ. You can receive Christ right there in your chair. If you want to have them come forward as a sign of what they just did, but not in order to come to Christ.

((EXAMPLE: EASTER VIDEO: (VIDEO OF AN INVITATION FROM A SADDLEBACK EASTER SERVICE))

2. Plan out YOUR INVITATION.

Be creative in inviting people to Christ. Spend a lot of time writing it out. It's too important to tack on with a Take-It-Or-Leave-It ending without any thought. The problem is if you don't write out your invitations, you're going to get into a rut and say the same thing every time. When you get in a rut and say the same thing every time people just start checking out. You have to check out new prayers. I actually write out my closing prayers. That's the one prayer I do write out because I want to say it in a little bit different way and I want to make sure I cover the points of the message.

3. Clearly explain HOW YOU WANT THEM TO RESPOND.

Too many invitations are misunderstood.

4. End WITH INTENSITY.

Put your heart into it. Preach through the head to the heart. Your conclusion ought to be the emotional high point of the message. The sermon should move toward a crescendo, moving, moving, arguing for a verdict, appealing for a decision. You've informed their minds, now you've touched their emotions. Now you are challenging and seeking to appeal to their will. So you're building to a crescendo with your message.

How do you do that? Remember that eternity is in the balance. That there may be somebody there that might be the last time they hear the gospel before they die. That may be their date with destiny. That may be their rendezvous with Christ. That very moment they walked in and they realized, "I'm not really a believer in Christ. I need Jesus. I need a personal relationship with Him." Heaven and hell are in the balance. Just get that in your mind and you'll end with intensity regardless of what you're speaking on. Just think about the eternal souls of people.

Let me give you a tip. One advantage of using a testimony in your message, actually inserting it into the message, is it gives you a chance to recharge right before the conclusion. I discovered this totally by accident. In doing multiple services, when I would say, "And now I want you to hear this..." and somebody would get up to give their testimony that fit the message that I was dealing with (guilt, bitterness, boredom, depression, whatever) as they would share their testimony, I would sit down. That would give me five minutes or four minutes or whatever it was, enough time to take a sip of water, relax, take a couple of deep breaths, pray, recharge. And then when they finish you get up and finish with a really stronger conclusion because you just got a little bit of break there after speaking for twenty or thirty minutes. It's a very powerful thing and if you preach multiple times it's a lifesaver.

5. MAKE IT PERSONAL.

When you're doing a conclusion, the people listening to you should feel like you're speaking directly to them. Not to the whole audience, not to the whole congregation, but directly to them. You get to the invitation and you want to talk personally to everybody and you say, "Let's bow our heads," and then you want to talk directly to that heart you just lower your voice and you talk into the microphone.

"I don't know why you came here today, but God knows why you came here today. And you're not here by accident. A thousand years before you were born God knew that you would be here at this point in time at this purpose so He could get your attention and He wants to say this to you."

See the difference in the tone of voice I'm using there rather than talking louder to a large group, to the whole group. Just lower your voice and talk more into the microphone and it takes a more intimate a more personal touch. Just a simple way of understanding the dynamics of communication. Always make your message personal. When you do that you go straight to the heart. People tell me all the time, "I felt like I was the only guy in the audience." I say, that's the Holy Spirit. Only the Holy Spirit could put 3000 people in a room and everybody feels like he's being talked to directly. But that is the power of the Holy Spirit.

6. Have the courage to ASK FOR A SPECIFIC RESPONSE.

The sermon comes down to two words, "Will you....?" and you fill in the blank. Nothing becomes dynamic until it becomes specific. So you ask for a specific response. Some guys when they preach they fizzle out at the end. Somebody said that the goal of the sermon is to storm the citadel of the will and capture it for Jesus Christ. I like that picture. How do you do that? Six ways.

1. Use arguments and argumentation. That is anticipating their objections and you logically refute them.
2. Use warning. Warn them of the consequences of disobedience.
3. Use indirect conviction, arouse moral indignation and then turn it on them. That's what Nathan did with David.
4. Use pleading when you express God's love and concern for them or others.
5. Use vision. You can paint a picture of what's possible if they obey God.
6. Use encouragement telling them, "You can do this with God's power!"

These are just different ways.

7. Expect people TO RESPOND.

One time a young student came to Spurgeon and said, "I don't understand. Whenever you preach people come to Christ and they receive Jesus. But whenever I preach nobody ever comes to Christ. What's the problem." Spurgeon looked at him and said, "You don't expect people to receive Jesus Christ every time you preach do you?" The young man said, "Well, no. Of course not." Spurgeon said, "That's your problem!"

I don't know how it works but I do know that God has a will for man and the devil has a will for man and man has a free will and there's constantly a spiritual battle going on and whether I'm going to choose God's will or the devil's will for my life. And I don't know how it works but I do know that faith plays a factor in that spiritual warfare and I do know that when I believe and expect people to decide for Christ, when I believe and expect people to go deep in their commitment, they do. I don't know how it works but I do know there is a faith factor that does that.

IDEAS FOR YOUR CONCLUSION

- **Restate YOUR MAJOR POINTS FORCEFULLY AND PERSONALLY.**
- **Use a COMPELLING ILLUSTRATION.**
- **Use a PIERCING QUESTION.**

The best conclusions: SURPRISE YOU

The best conclusions sneak up on a person. They kind of catch him off guard. If you're kind of winding down and they know you're winding down and you're spiraling down they're way ahead of you. There's no drama in it because you already knew where he was going. You want to surprise people sometime and just Bam! "Let's pray!" and go right into the point in question. What that does is get their attention.

- **Write out YOUR CLOSING PRAYER.**

As I said, I want to suggest that you write out your closing prayer. I always lead them in a prayer of commitment that applies the points of the message.

- **Rewrite your conclusion AFTER THE FIRST SERVICE.**

If you do multiple services rewrite your conclusion after the first service. I can't tell you how many times I do that. It is inevitably better. When you get up to preach you don't really know yet the emotional tone of the message until you've preached it. That's why preaching multiple services will make you a better preacher because you get better. There's no comparison between the first message I do on Saturday night and the fourth or the fifth that I do on Sunday.

Rewrite your conclusion after your first service because you know how your sermon feels so you end up writing a stronger conclusion.

- **Offer a NEW BELIEVER TABLE with FOLLOW-UP PACKETS.**

The invitation in reverse. If you give a traditional invitation and you knew you would be killed if you cut it out (you'd be martyred by your members) give it but give an alternate invitation too. Give a come forward invitation and then say at the end, "Maybe you just didn't feel comfortable coming forward. Right in front of you in your seat there's a card. You can fill out that card and say 'I want to give my life to Christ,' and you can either leave it there in your seat and we'll pick it up or you can hand it to me on the way out." Offer two forms of invitations. You'll pick up some other people.

After asking who will be listening and what the Bible says about their needs, and then asking what would be the most practical, positive and encouraging ways to say it – then I ask a sixth question.

VI. WHAT IS THE SIMPLEST WAY TO SAY IT?

Because with simplicity comes clarity, and with a clear word from God there is power.

Paul said to the Corinthians:

"When I came to you, it was not with any show of oratory or philosophy, but simply to tell you what God has guaranteed." 1 Cor. 2:1 (JB)

1 Corinthians 2:4 Paul's explaining his preaching style,

"My preaching was very plain, not with a lot of oratory..." 1 Cor. 2:4 (LB)

He says I didn't come to you with any oratory. I was plain and didn't speak with a lot of oratory.

What is oratory? Oratory is just dramatically stating what people already agree with. That's oratory. It's used to reinforce commonly held beliefs and values. It is the old fashioned way of communicating.

The only place you hear oratory today (You don't even hear it at political rallies any more) is at preaching conferences. Oratory never says anything new; it never says anything different. It just states in a dramatic way what you already agree with. It's like preaching to the choir. And regardless of the fellowship or the denomination that you belong to, at your denominational meeting there are certain code words that if you say those words it brings a shout from the camp. "The blood! The Book! The blessed hope!" In my denomination you have to use the word, "I believe in the inerrancy of scripture." I do believe in the inerrancy of scripture but just to state it in a dramatic way to people who are already convinced of it is oratory. To unchurched people - if you use oratory like that, they're not even going to know what you're talking about.

"Oratory" only works on people who are ALREADY CONVINCED.

It rarely converts anybody. It seldom changes anybody's mind. It's just a dramatic restatement of the same old stuff we've already agreed to. Paul says "I didn't come to you with oratory. And my speech was very plain, very simple."

Why should my delivery be simple? Titus 2:8

"Your speech should be unaffected and logical so that your opponents may feel ashamed at finding nothing in which to pick holes." Titus 2:8 (Ph)

One of the things I love about Jesus is that He taught profound truths in simple ways.

Jesus taught profound truths in SIMPLE WAYS.

We do the exact opposite of that. We teach simple truths in profound ways. And a lot of times we think we're being deep but we're just being muddy. We're not really saying anything.

"...the common people heard him gladly." Mark 12:37 (KJV)

Is that true with you? That common people hear you gladly? Spurgeon said "A sermon's like a well. If there's anything in it, it appears bright and reflecting. If there's nothing in it, it appears dark and deep and mysterious. A lot of preachers are just empty wells with a dead cat or two thrown in." When you're being deep you're often just being confusing.

It's easy to confuse people. I have several advanced degrees and I've got an earned doctorate and I can get up and quote a few Greek and Hebrew verbs and people will go, "Is he deep!!" No, I was just confusing. I can take a text and make it so complicated they'd go, "He was plowing deep!" And I could walk off, "Got 'em! I confused them. I made them think that I was really an intellectual!" But I didn't feed them on the word of God.

It is easy to complicate the gospel. But it takes a lot of study and preparation to make it simple. Einstein once said

"*You don't really understand something unless you can explain it in a simple way.*"

Albert Einstein

"You don't really understand something unless you can explain it in a simple way." You can be brilliant but if you can't communicate your truth in a simple way your wisdom isn't worth much. The simplest things in life are the strongest things. I remember as my kids were growing up, when they were little, their toys were very simple. As a one and two year old they had these little molded plastic toys like bats and balls and blocks. They were just a piece of molded plastic. It's not going to decompose for 3000 years! On the other hand as they get older they started buying these little robotronic and things that had fifty gizmos and the more complicated a toy is the quicker it breaks.

That's true with a message. The more complicated, the more sub-points you have in a message, the quicker it is going to break. The simpler your message is, the fewer your points, the stronger the outline is.

Don't misunderstand me.

SIMPLE DOESN'T MEAN SUPERFICIAL/SHALLOW/SIMPLISTIC!

Simple does not mean shallow. Simple does not mean superficial. Simple does not mean simplistic. Simple means simple.

Let me give you the difference. Simple is, *"This is the day the Lord has made. I will rejoice and be glad."* That's simple. Simplistic is, "Have a nice day!" You get the difference? One has profound truth behind it. The other is simplistic.

Colossians 1:28 (The Message paraphrase)

"I fear...(Satan) will corrupt you from the simplicity that is in Christ." 2 Cor. 11:3 (KJV)

The Christian message really is very simple and Satan wants to complicate it. He wants us to detour from the central obvious truths.

One of the greatest reasons why you want to keep your delivery simple is because we forget 90-95% of what we hear within 72 hours.

We forget 95% of what we hear in 72 hours.

That's a statistic from a study done by the United States Air Force. And if you want a statistic to depress the average pastor, there it is. People forget 90 to 95 percent of what they hear in 72 hours. That means you studied all week, you prepared these pearls of wisdom, you throw them out on Sunday, and by Wednesday, they've already forgotten all but five percent. That's discouraging, unless you give them something for their hands. So I'm a firm believer in using outlines that are written out.

So the simplified message has the best chance of being remembered.

HOW TO SIMPLIFY YOUR MESSAGES

1. Condense the message into A SINGLE SENTENCE.

If you can't say the sermon in a sentence then your purpose isn't clear enough. And if you don't know where you're headed then the people can't follow you. The fewest words have the greatest impact. The Lord's Prayer uses 56 words. The Gettysburg Address uses 267 words. The Declaration of Independence uses 1322 words. But a recent government report regulating the sell of cabbage has 26,901 words. What has the most impact?

If you say it in a short way, you're saying it like a bullet into the heart.

2. Avoid using "RELIGIOUS" TERMS.

When you're preaching to the unchurched you don't want to use words like "propitiation" "sanctification". Many pastors speak in an unknown tongue every week and they're not even charismatic. I have discovered that people who have to use big words usually have big insecurities. You can know a lot of big words but you don't have to use them. You just have to understand them. Too many sermons are glorified Greek studies with a few illustrations thrown in. Most people don't care about Greek as much as you do.

I saw a cartoon: a guy's standing before his church and the pews are 90% empty and the people who are there are dead asleep. He's saying, "Interestingly enough the Latin word for tapioca is..." (Picture of Cartoon included on POWERPOINT)

Who cares?

Using a lot of Greek is just showing off. I once taught a doctrinal seminar on preaching with Chuck Swindoll and Jack Hayford and Chuck Smith. The four of us came together for a seminary showing our teaching style. Swindoll said something I really agreed with, "Using too many word studies discourages confidence in the English text." If you keep using word study after word study people will start thinking, "I can't ever know what the Bible says just reading it. I'd never understand the true meaning."

Avoid using technical terms and avoid using religious terms.

People don't talk in religious terms any more. They use psychological terms. You may not like that. Sorry! But that's the audience you have to deal with. They say when they're under pressure, "I'm all stressed out!... I'm at the end of my rope... I'm about to come unglued... I'm ready to throw in the towel... I'm way in over my head..." They don't say, "I'm experiencing total moral depravity."

The fact is - that IS their problem. They are experiencing total moral depravity but they don't use those terms. I love to teach theology without ever telling people it's theology and without ever using theological terms. I do it all the time. I've done series on the Attributes of God, His omniscience, His omnipresence, His immutability, all of the characteristics of God – eight or nine week series to unbelievers and never used the terms. I did an entire series on sanctification and never used the term. I've done series on the incarnation, justification and never used the terms.

If you will study history, you will find that every time there's been a major revival in history is because somebody took the message of the Bible and put it in the common language of that day. That is what brings revival.

Some of you who are far more smarter than I need to go out and translate biblical terms into contemporary terms. Put the message of the Bible in the common language of the people. A lot of words people don't understand. Even words like "Lord". We've used that word so much we don't even think about it. We just say, "Lord Jesus." But we live in a democracy. We don't live in a feudal environment. We don't have lords and ladies and kings and queens and counts and vassals and serfs and squires. We're not in a feudal system. And we don't walk around calling anybody Lord so and so and Lady so and so. They did in other days. But we're a democracy. So what does "Lord" mean?

Today when I try to teach people what does it mean to make Jesus Christ the Lord of your life I'll say, "To make Jesus Lord of your life means to bring Him in as manager of your life. You actually put on a sign that says 'I'm under new management'. That's what it means to be a believer – under new management. Jesus Christ is the CEO of my life. He's the boss. He calls the shots. He is the chairman of the board. He's not just resident in my life. He's president of my life. He's in charge and I'm under new management." That is understandable. Lordship is not.

Even when you use a word like "sin". What's sin? Sin means a thousand different things to different people. I asked a guy on the plane one time what is sin. And he said, "A sin is not saluting the flag." That was his definition of sin.

So you have to worry about your speaking. Too many preachers are still reading Spurgeon. You could preach like Spurgeon if you had Spurgeon's audience. Spurgeon was a genius. I have one of his hand written sermons in my study. I had a great grandfather who was saved under Spurgeon and I'm interested in his life. Spurgeon was a genius. If he were alive today he wouldn't preach like he did then. He'd realize we're in a television age. An MTV age. An Internet age. And he would communicate in a way that would be appropriate today.

3. Keep your outline SIMPLE!

Reduce your insights to a few major points. In a seminar like this where we have a couple of days to learn together, we can talk about a lot of points. In a sermon you don't have a couple of days – you only have 30 or 40 minutes.

People don't remember complicated outlines. Haddon Robinson said,

"Television has destroyed linear thinking." Haddon Robinson

I agree with him. People cannot follow sub-points unless you give them a handout outline. They just can't follow sub-points. You say, "Here are three things... Here are four things..." Every once in a while you break your own rule. I did a message a while back that had nine points. I knew it was way too much for the people to handle so the next week I stood up and said, "Last week I did a message with nine points so to make up for it today's message will be pointless."

Make it straightforward.

Beware of alliterations!

Ones you really need to be aware of are these expository princes who do these triple alliterations. I read one the other day. "The concerned Christ of Calvary's cruel cross". Point 2:

“The Crucified Christ of Calvary’s Cruel Cross.” Point 3: “The Crowned Christ of Calvary’s Cruel Cross.” He’s just showing off!

Teaching Tip

Obviously the illustrations based on alliterations and rhymes in these points will not work when the conference is being translated. As an alternative, you can work with your translator to have them express alliterations or rhymes in their language. If the translator is confident enough to do this, it can be an enjoyable exchange for those you are teaching – even if you struggle a bit to come up with the right words in each language.

It is more important to be CLEAR than cute.

Be aware of Rhymes. Rhymes can get you in trouble. I found one on the prodigal son awhile back on “his Madness and his Sadness and his Gladness.” Then I found the points under it: One, His Madness: He wanted his ten; he gave up his kin; he surrendered to sin. Two, Badness: He went to the dogs, he ate with the hogs; he hocked all his togs, and homeward he jogs. Then we finally see his Gladness: He was given the seal, he ate the veal, and he danced the reel! Cute, not clear. Keep it simple.

One study showed that if people were interested they’re going to remember about seven bits of information. If they’re not interested they’ll remember no more than two bits of information. So too much of anything reduces its value. Too much corn and the price of corn goes down. Too much wheat and the price of wheat goes down. Too many words in your sermon and the price of your sermon goes down. The strongest messages usually have the fewest points.

One of the things that you’re taught in seminary to do is what I call preaching on a bias. That kind of looks like this: You have a big major Roman Numeral point and under your Roman numeral one you have maybe an A point and under that a one and two and maybe a three. Then you’ve got a B and so on. You’re all familiar with this kind of outline.

Teaching Tip

For this illustration of “preaching on the bias” it is good to have a chalkboard or whiteboard or a over head projector that you can write on. The illustrations look like this.

“Preaching on the bias”

I

A

B

1

2

3

Write the Roman numerals, and then draw the lines that show how the outline runs on the bias (the diagonal) across the page.

And then, when you write the illustration of the Big point and the “little points,” make sure that your voice matches the points as you write.

Write a Roman numeral I. – and almost yell “A Big point!!”

Write an A. and say “a medium sized point” in your regular voice

Write a 1. And say “a little point” in a soft voice

Write a little “a.” and say “a little bitty point” in a high pitched tiny voice.

Write another large Roman numeral 1. And yell “another big point!”

You get the idea!

I call this preaching on a bias because what it does is kind of goes across the page. That may look good and you may have been taught that in seminary but nobody can preach that way really. Big points and little points and littler points... If I actually preached a message on an outline like that this is how it would sound: Here’s a big point! Here’s a medium point. Little point, little point, little point. Medium point. Little point, little point, teeny tiny little point. Another big point! Little point... Nobody can really preach like that! This is just neo-scholasticism. It’s

Greek logic and it has nothing to do with the New Testament. It has more in common with Aristotle than with Jesus. Jesus never preached this way with points and subpoints and little subpoints. And people can't follow subpoints unless you give them notes and the more elaborate and alliterated you become the more confusing it becomes. So you want to strive toward a clear, clean, simple outline.

I deeply believe the next statement I'm about to make:

Teaching Tip

A statement like that above (I deeply believe this next statement) helps to make sure that everyone hears that which you most want them to understand. People obviously don't give the same amount of attention to every statement in a one or two day conference, and this is the kind of statement that helps them to focus. It can also be helpful to say something like, "Everyone look at me for just a moment; I don't want you to miss what I'm about to say."

The TEXT should determine the SUBSTANCE of your message but the way people HEAR AND LEARN should determine the STRUCTURE of your message.

Jesus modeled that truth in every single sermon He delivered. Even when you're preaching on a single passage, you're obligated to apply the truth of that passage but you are not forced to organize your points in the order of the text. No where in the Bible does it say you have to do that. You are obligated to make the truth clear, plain, practical, applicable to peoples' lives but Nowhere does it say your points have to be in the order the story is told. As you would know by some of the stories that are told three and four times in the four gospels, they're told in different order. God doesn't even care about the order because they're not even in the same order in the gospels. And they leave out different details.

The story of the feeding of the five thousand is in all four gospels and not one of them is identical. Different facts in terms of who saw what and who did what and what happened when. When you start trying to harmonize those things it'll drive you crazy.

So you're not forced to organize your points in order of the text. That is a manmade rule and sometimes that hinders communication. It hinders effectiveness.

For instance, if you're trying to preach verse by verse through Proverbs, forget it. Because the next verse isn't going to in any way relate to the previous verse. No way. Same thing with Psalms. David's all over the place. He's having this emotional breakdown. It isn't going to happen!

Life is messy! It doesn't fit in a neat box. Every verse and every chapter and every paragraph does not fit in a nice three point alliterated outline. Don't even try. Don't worry about it. The important thing is to teach the applicable truths, the timeless principle and preach for obedience and repentance. Don't worry about the outline. It can come in any order. If you want to take verse 4 before you take verse 2 that's ok. You cannot show me any verse in the Bible that says it has to be taken in order. Because it's not true.

Study how Jesus used the Old Testament. That'll blow your mind. If you study how Jesus used verses out of the Old Testament and New, many scholars today would call it proof-texting. He takes verses from one place and applies it to another and you're going, "Where did He get that?!?!" Jesus destroys most of the principles that were taught about how to use the Old Testament. He just doesn't fit the academic model.

The bottom line is, Are you more interested in the literary order of the text or are you more interested in making it easy for people to apply? That's what it comes down to. You have to choose one or the other. Do I major on application or do I major on the literary form?

Most sermons are arranged in one of two ways.

Typical Sermon Structures

A		B	
I.	Point describing the text	I.	Point describing the text
II.	Point describing the text		Application
III.	Point describing the text	II.	Point describing the text
IV.	Point describing the text		Application
	Application	III.	Point describing the text
			Application

I want to suggest a third possible way. A life changing outline. It is this:

- LIFE CHANGE OUTLINE**
- I. **Personal application statement**
Content of the text
 - II. **Personal application statement**
Content of the text
 - III. **Personal application statement**
Content of the text

I'm saying, reverse the order. Instead of Explaining the text, Apply it, Explaining the text, Apply it. Just reverse it. Start with the Application and show how the Scripture explains it. Another Application and show how the Scripture explains it.

IF THE POINT OF THE MESSAGE IS APPLICATION

THEN MY APPLICATIONS SHOULD BE MY POINTS!

What is the purpose of your points? Why do you even have points in the first place? Are you using points to help you stay focused as a preacher, as a speaker? Are you using your points to get your audience to remember how you organized the text? Are you using the points to show how you have great ability with alliteration?

If your points aren't your applications, then there's no need for an outline. People don't remember your cute little alliterations. Cute little alliterations never change anybody. If your points are just there to keep yourself on track, keep them to yourself. You don't even need to tell the people your points.

If people are only going to remember one thing and that's the points what do you want them to remember? The truths of the text or your cute textual outline? You don't care if they remember your cute textual outline. You want their life to be changed. So make your applications your points. If they're only going to remember the points then that's what you want them to remember.

This is the most important thing I'll say this afternoon. If the point of the message is application, then application should be your points.

You need to understand the difference between a content outline and a communication outline. A content outline purpose is to teach the Bible. The purpose of a communication outline is to change lives.

CONTENT OUTLINES VS. COMMUNICATION OUTLINES

Let me give you an example between a content outline and a communication outline: In a content outline you basically outline the text in a cute little alliteration. Let's take the book of Jonah. It has four chapters. It breaks into four good points. So if you were going to preach on the book of Jonah your first chapter is about how Jonah runs down to Joppa and gets on a boat which is headed for Tarsus which is a sea coast port in Spain. God had told him to go east and he went as far west possible as he could. So in Jonah chapter one we have "See Jonah running". Then we come to chapter two and he's thrown overboard, thrown to the bottom of the ocean, he's swallowed up by a great fish and when he hits the bottom of the ocean he prays a prayer and chapter two is Jonah's prayer of repentance, "God, I'm sorry I blew it. I should have trusted You." So chapter two is "See Jonah repenting." (By the way one of my favorite verses is in chapter 2. It says in the Living Bible *"When I lost all hope I once again turned my thoughts to You."*) Chapter three has one of my favorite verses in the Old Testament *"And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah a second time."* Aren't you glad we serve a God of the second chance and third chance and fourth chance and on and on? So when this whale spits him out on dry land, he hits the ground running and heads for Nineveh. He's going back to where he should have gone in the first place. So in chapter three we have "See Jonah returning".

Then you spend the next two hours trying to find your fourth "R". You know that because you've all done it. In Jonah chapter 4 God brings great revival to Nineveh. Jonah preaches and sure enough everybody turns to God. There's a great citywide revival and Jonah gets mad. These were his enemy, that's the reason he didn't want to go in the first place. He didn't want them saved. It's like having your worst enemy whom you hated come to Christ and be forgiven for all the things they've done wrong *to you*. So he goes out and sits out there and the gourd is growing and then it dies. And he's just complaining and complaining. And God says, "Don't you know that I love those people? Don't you know I care for those even those who don't know their right hand from the left, even the little children? I love them all." So in Jonah chapter 4 we have "See Jonah Ranting and Raving".

That's a cute little alliterated outline but is that what I want people to really remember about the book of Jonah? Do I want them to remember my cute little alliteration on what the book of Jonah is about? Running, Repenting, Returning, and Ranting and Raving. No.

What I want them to do is get the truth out of it that changes their lives. So what I might do is call this message, a communication message, "What to do when you've really messed up." Because that's what Jonah is all about. He totally messed up his life. What you want to remember is not what Jonah did but the truth of the chapter. What is the truth of chapter one and how do you put it in a present tense application?

The truth of chapter one is You can run but you can't hide. So I would put it in a statement maybe like this, "Realize God is everywhere." No matter where he went. When he was in Joppa God knew where he was. When he was on board, He knew where he was. When he was at the bottom of the ocean, He knew where he was. You can run but you cannot hide. When you've really messed up, realize that God was all those places that you were messing up. He was there in that bar. He was there in that bedroom. He was there. He's everywhere.

In chapter two he repents. But he didn't repent until the bottom fell out in his life. He was at the bottom of the ocean and the message of Jonah 2 is when you hit bottom that's when you really need to look up so I might say the second point would be, "Refocus on God wherever you are." That's the message of Jonah 2. He hits the bottom of the ocean in the belly of a whale and then he repents. When you hit bottom, look up. Refocus on God wherever you are. Have you messed up your life? Wherever you are right now, refocus on God. You don't have to wait until you get back to church, just refocus on God wherever you are.

Jonah 3 where the whale spits him out and he hits the ground running and the word of the Lord comes to Jonah a second time. I'd say the third step you need to do when you've really messed up your life is Receive God's second chance. And you talk about grace. Realize God's everywhere when you messed up. He was there in all those times. Refocus on God wherever you are. You Receive God's second chance – grace.

Then in chapter 4. What's that about? God says to Jonah, "I don't just care about you. I care about all these people. I love them and I want them to know Me." So the message focuses off of Jonah onto everybody else so my fourth point might be, "Share God's love with everyone." Once you've come back share God's love with everybody else.

So, What do you do when you've messed up? Realize God's everywhere, Refocus on God wherever you are, Receive God's second chance, and once God's given you His grace you Share God's love with everybody else.

But the fourth point doesn't have an "R"! It's more important to be clear than cute!

If you want to change lives:

Use an outline that communicates the APPLICATION of the text instead of one that just describes the CONTENT of the text.

The Bible should determine the SUBSTANCE of your message.

People's needs should determine the STRUCTURE.

HOW TO ARRANGE YOUR OUTLINE FOR MAXIMUM IMPACT

1. GET TO POINT QUICKLY

The classic sermons of last century are very long and very flowery. The Puritan sermons particularly will have 57 points and often long introductions and complicated points. Today the audience has changed. You don't have any Puritans listening to you. Not by a long shot! They lost their purity a long time ago! People don't listen the way they used to before television and radio and internet.

You may not like that but you've got to live with it. You can't change it. You may wish that you could preach during the Reformation. Or you may wish that you could preach during the Puritan years. But you can't. You've got to serve God's purpose in your generation. And you have to minister in today's culture with today's limitations and that means you have to get to the point quick. A lot of guys preaching today is what I call Long Horn Preaching, a point here, a point there and a lot of bull in between! In today's world, people want it quick and they want it up front and they're conditioned to get their teaching in bullet points – Bam! Bam! Bam! Bam! Bam! You may not like it but tough! That's who you've got to minister to. And if you don't learn to minister to people like that you won't minister to people.

2. STATE YOUR POINTS IN COMPLETE SENTENCES

Not in phrases, not in words. Your points should be so clear that people could understand them even without the text of the sermon. They ought to be able to look at your notes and go, "That's helpful!" And they could take your points that are so self-explanatory and read the outline and it makes sense once it's all filled in.

Many outlines don't say anything!

Here's one from the book Power in Expository Preaching based on Luke 18

Luke 18:6-8

- 1. The helpless**
- 2. The helper**
- 3. The appeal**
- 4. The encouragements**

(From Power in Expository Preaching, Whitesell)

What in the world is that outline saying? That's power in expository preaching? Question: Is that worth remembering? Is it helpful? Is it even worth writing down? Is that an outline I can share with my neighbor? No. State your points in complete sentences.

3. MAKE SURE YOUR POINTS HAVE UNITY AND BALANCE

They need symmetry.

Examples: Do these points make sense together? Point 1: Jesus died. Point 2: Jesus was raised. Point 3: We must raise \$30,000 or I'll die! That does not have unity and balance. 1 Corinthians 14:33 says *"God is not the author of confusion."* So you need to have unity and balance in your messages.

Another example: Point 1: You can be free; Point 2: You can be forgiven; Point 3: It will save you from the fire of hell and eternal damnation; Point 4: You can be fulfilled. Were any of those points out of balance?

Without unity a lot of sermons just bounce around from point to point. They're words without a purpose. They wander around.

Kind of like this grade school essay on pigs: Pigs. A pig is a funny animal but it has some uses. Our dog doesn't like pigs. Our dog's name is Nero. My teacher read a piece one day about a wicked man called Nero. My daddy is a good man. Men are very useful. Men are different than women and my mom ain't like my daddy. My mom says that a ring around the sun means a storm is coming and that's all I know about pigs.

A lot of sermons are kind of like that – piggy sermons.

One way to create unity: use “*Category Words*”

SAMPLE CATEGORY WORDS

Abuses	Acts	Advantages	Affirmations
Aims	Alternatives	Answers	Approaches
Arguments	Aspects	Assurances	Attitudes
Attributes	Barriers	Beliefs	Benefits
Blessings	Causes	Certainties	Challenges
Changes	Commitments	Conditions	Consequences
Contrasts	Dangers	Decisions	Demands
Differences	Disciplines	Discoveries	Duties
Essentials	Evidences	Examples	Expectations
Expressions	Facets	Factors	Facts
Failures	Fears	Features	Fundamentals
Gifts	Groups	Habits	Hopes

And more and more!

What am I doing? Instead of saying, “There are five things in this text.” What’s a “thing”? “Thing” is an overused word when you can’t think of another category. Say, “There are five benefits in this text... There are five demands in this text... There are five habits... five beliefs.” Those are category words. The word “thing” is overused and doesn’t make much impact.

4. MAKE SURE YOUR POINTS FOLLOW A CLEAR, LOGICAL PROGRESSION

Follow the natural steps or sequences. An outline needs unity – that is the points make sense together. But it also needs movement and that is when you feel like you’re making progress.

I don’t know how to teach you this except to say, when you’ve got five points you want to make you want to put your strongest appeal, obviously, as your last point. Because you’re going to drive home the point. You probably want to put your second strongest appeal right up front. Then hide your weak points in the middle. But you need to have some logical progression because if your best point is your first point and then it’s down hill from there, they’re going to be asleep by the time you get to the conclusion. You have to know how to make a logical progression.

Your message must have MOVEMENT if you want to move people!

You’re moving them from Point A to Point B to Point C to Point D to “Let’s bow our heads and you’re going to change!” That’s movement! Great messages have both unity and movement.

Unity – all the points fit together. Movement – they build on each other. It's not enough just to have unity – all the points fit together. A great message has movement. And the points become stronger and stronger until bam! The pros at this are black preachers. With call and response and cadence you can often come back and hit it and hit it and hit it and by the time you're through you're going "Yeah! I can't wait to make that decision!" It's moving me along.

Here are a couple of examples of movement.

OUTLINES WITH MOVEMENT

- | | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. TELL THEM WHY | 1. ESTABLISH A NEED | 1. WHAT? |
| 2. SHOW THEM HOW | 2. GIVE PERSONAL EXAMPLES | 2. SO WHAT? |
| | 3. PRESENT A PLAN | 3. NOW WHAT? |
| | 4. OFFER HOPE | |
| | 5. CALL FOR COMMITMENT | |
| | 6. EXPECT RESULTS | |

Tell them why and show them how. That's the simplest movement you can make in a message. Probably half of my messages follow that format right there. Tell them why, show them how. That's a simple movement message.

Another: Establish a need, give a personal example, present a plan, offer hope, call for commitment, expect results. That's an outline with movement.

Another: What? So what? Now what? Start with "What? (What are we talking about?), So what? (Why are we talking about this?), Now what? (What do you want me to do?) Go study Peter's message in Acts 2 and you've got a good example of that.

5. ARRANGE YOUR POINTS TO CLIMAX WITH A COMMITMENT.

Figure out what order is going to make the most impact and as I said, you probably want your strongest point at the end and your second strongest point up near the top. If you're planning on challenging people to commitment at the end, you don't want to end with an emotional dud. When you give a message sometimes, one point is sometimes kind of light and humorous. And another point is kind of serious and challenging. Obviously you're not going to put them in the wrong order and end with the humorous. You want to end with the "What are you going to do about it now?" You make sure that that point is right there at the end.

Sermon preparation requires that you feel the emotional impact of a point. You've got to figure out what emotion am I going to have at this point so where will I put it. It's not just understanding a point intellectually. It's being able to feel how am I going to feel when I share that point. When I share that point, you want your strongest feelings to be right there at your close. A sermon's power is affected by two things: content and emotion. You want to take the point that has the strongest emotion and make sure you don't use up all your gas in your first point.

6. ARRANGE YOUR POINTS TO USE "TENSION AND RELEASE"

All good communicators know that there are mountains and valleys in a message. There's emotional highs and lows. You can't keep people tense all the time. A message has to go up and down and up and down.... and if you're going to keep them longer than about ten minutes

you have to have multiple ups and downs for tension, release, tension, release... to keep people's attention. If you are constantly building – tension, tension, tension – by the time you get to the close they're so nervous they can't do anything because you've got them all uptight. On the other hand if you start high, by the time you get to the end of the message they're asleep. If you don't ever have any tension, release in your message that's called being a lecturer. They're going to be bored with that. You're preaching for persuasion. You need to know tension and release, tension and release – ups and downs. That gives people breaks.

How do you do that? In order to not keep people tense how do you give them release?

One way is humor. Humor gives a release. An illustration gives a break. If you're just doing didactic teaching like I'm doing right now and it's probably been about five minutes since I gave you a real good illustration you're going to start to wander. Because I'm teaching you without stopping to give you an illustration. When I do that your mind starts to wander.

You can't do that any more. A hundred years ago you didn't have to give that many illustrations. People would listen to you preach. But TV has conditioned people to think in modules. Ten minutes of story – commercial. Ten minutes of story – commercial... We have these bite size pieces. It's almost like Cliffhanger – commercial – cliffhanger – commercial – cliffhanger – commercial – cliffhanger – resolution – commercial.

Again, you may not like that. But that's the way the people in our churches are conditioned to think today. They've had forty years of listening to television.

What are the most popular movies today? They are those that combine both suspense and humor. Like the action film with humor – tension and release, tension and release. One minute you're on the edge of your seat and the next minute you're dying of laughter ... Why? Why do those movies become so popular? Americans love to feel their emotions. We are a very emotional nation. We love the adrenaline rush of being scared, being entertained, put in suspense, seeing something that's shocking, whatever.

A couple of years ago I helped for two years on the Dreamworks film "The Prince of Egypt". They asked me to be a consultant. I went up to Dreamworks. This is the Jeffrey Katzenberg, Stephen Spielberg movie on the story of Moses. In Dreamworks on the wall in the hallway going down to the cafeteria, that all the animators have to pass by in order to go to lunch is a story board of the whole story of The Prince of Egypt, Moses. That was interesting but what was more fascinating to me was what they had on the wall called "The Emotional Beat Chart".

Here at Saddleback, for many years, Rick Muchow and I have planned what's a two humped camel – it goes up and down, up and down. In a period of about sixty minutes we'll have about six ups and downs. Six mountains and valleys emotionally.

When people get here to the service they're down low. They're kind of crawling in. They're not awake yet. You've got to wake them up. So in this church the very first thing we do always is an upbeat song you have to tap your toe to. Clap, Movement. We wake up the body of Christ by waking up bodies. So we start our service, every service with a song that you feel like moving to. It gets people moving. They're down low and we get them moving, we bring them up. Then what we'd normally do after we get them up is have a prayer, then we'd have announcements which is definitely a low. You go back down. And then we would start what we call our set, which is a set of music – three or four songs – and we'd do PAC – Praise, Adoration and Commitment. Praise would be a fast song about God. And we're moving back up again. Adoration would be a slow song to God. And Commitment song to God would be "God, I want to give my life back to You." Then we'd bring it back down with, like, a scripture reading and

prayer in a more meditative, quiet, somber moment. Then right before I speak we would have a special number and it's always an upbeat number. I don't want somebody singing, "I'm just a Poor Wayfaring Stranger," before I get up to speak. I want to hit it on the going up part. I'm not ready for the commitment and down part yet. I want to start the message not at a somber moment but at a more energetic moment. So they have a song that builds back up and then during my message I will have several ups and downs in the message depending how long it is, using illustration, humor, testimonies. Then we take it down right before we close – a time of commitment, which is a serious, meditative, somber, "What are you going to do with your life?" Then after the time of commitment the last thing we do in our church is take the offering and have another special number and it's an upbeat song again. And the closing song is always an upbeat song. Up and down and up and down. Using in a sixty minute frame we'd have six up and downs. In a seventy minute – seven up and downs.

I was interested in seeing their emotional beat chart at Dreamworks. Here was a ninety minute movie and they actually used twine to show the highs and lows of the movie. It went high and low nine times in ninety minutes. It was interesting to me the exact same thing, ten minute intervals that we use here at Saddleback to help keep people's attention.

I then asked Katzenburg, how did they create those moments. He said writing, music, color (light colors and pastels for lighter moments, dark colors, dark reds for more intense moments).

You need to have some progression in realizing how your points are arranged make a difference in how powerful the message is. Some points are more convicting than others. Some points are lighter than others.

You can often get away with a stronger rebuke if you sandwich it between two lighter moments. If you've got something you really need to say and it's going to be tough for them to hear it, you sandwich it between two lighter moments.

For instance I did a message a while back on five principles for financial Stability. Here were the points. Which of these do you think would be the most difficult for people to hear?

Five Principles For Financial Stability

- 1. Keep good records.**
- 2. Plan your spending.**
- 3. Save for the future.**
- 4. Return 10% to God.**
- 5. Enjoy what you have.**

Return ten percent to God! That's one of the five principles of finances. I'm not going to start with that one because they're going to think, "This is a sermon on tithing." And they'll click out right at the start. I also don't want to end with it because it's not a sermon on tithing. If I just built to that – give ten percent then they'd think it is just a tithing message. So what I do is put it in the middle. Keep good records, Plan your spending, Save for the future, Return ten percent to God, Enjoy what you have. Up, Up, Up, Down, Up.

I did this because I wanted them to obey all five principles. I wanted them to see that tithing was one of the five pillars of financial stability but I put it between two less threatening points. What was the result of that? Nearly 3000 people signed commitment cards that day. And our weekly giving increased \$75,000 a week. Our giving went up 33% as a result of one message.

Placement of your points has a lot to do with the impact of your message.

7. CONSIDER HOW YOUR POINTS SOUND WHEN ARRANGING THEM.

Remember, you're going to speak these points. That's why it's good to listen to tapes, because in tapes, you hear how messages are shared. You get not only content, but you also get delivery. Complete but short sentences are really the best for oral communication. Really long sentences for a point are hard to communicate. So you want a full sentence, but you want to say it in as few words as possible. Recently, Kay did a retreat message, and her points were, I must master my moods, maintain my focus, manage my time, and maximize my talent. There's a natural cadence to that, Ta da, da, da, da. Those kind of messages have a power to them. The longer your point is, the less likely it's going to be memorable. So you want to consider how it sounds. Complete short sentences, as I said, are best for oral communication. They allow you to create a case, and they, above all, allow you to recap. Because you need to go back. You can go right back over the points without getting too detailed.

8. PROVIDE AN OUTLINE WITH THE BIBLE VERSES WRITTEN OUT.

I'm a firm believer in giving people not only something for their head and something for their heart, but also something for their hand. When you want to help people change, something for their head, something for their heart, and something for their hand. So you hand them an outline. Now, there are a number of benefits to doing this.

BENEFITS

- **The unchurched don't bring bibles!**

And if you're going to reach large numbers of unbelievers, like this church does, they don't walk in with the Bible. And so you want to hand them the verses, because you want them to discover the Bible. You want them to study the Bible. You want them to see this is a Bible based message.

- **It relieves embarrassment in finding a text.**

When you write out the Bible verses in your outline, they don't have to try to find them. I remember one lady telling me, she came to Saddleback, in the early years before we had outlines. And she said, turning to John 14, she said the lady next to her was, like, the sword drill champion of 1954. And, bam, she was right there. She said, I had already finished preaching on the verse and she was still over in the index trying to find John.

- **You can cover more material in less time.**

I once did a study. I timed, using a stopwatch, the amount of time spent turning pages when listening to the message of a well-known Bible teacher. He kept saying, now, turn to this. Now, turn to this. Now, turn to this. He spent nearly five minutes of the message just letting people turn. That's five minutes I don't want to give up. That's five minutes I want to be used challenging, exhorting, encouraging, comforting, helping, explaining, applying.

- **You can have everyone read aloud together.**

You can't do that if you're going to have people looking it up in their Bible, because you're going to get many different translations in a typical service. But when you print the verse out,

everybody can read it aloud. At Saddleback, in our evangelistic services, we do more Bible reading together than most churches do in a believer's service, because we actually have the verses written out, and they read them all together.

- **They can review it later.**

I once preached a message from Jesus sermon on the mount on how to handle your anger. I remember a guy told me much later that he would never forget that message. I said "why?" He said, "well, about two months ago my daughter, who was a high school student, was in a car accident. And she was fine and so were all of their friends. But she wrecked the front end of the car and it was her fault. She just was careless. When she called, he said, are you all you right? And she said, 'yeah, dad. I'm okay, but I just ruined the car.'" So he said he drove down there and he actually arrived before the people who were going to tow the car away. So he sat down on the edge of the road at the curbside, and he said, "I was getting really furious. And I was starting to get really uptight about what it was going to cost and why she wasn't more careful. But then, I looked down, and in the gutter, there was a piece of paper that I recognized, and it was a Saddleback outline." And he said, "I picked it up and it was called, how to control your anger." And he said, "look at this." And he pulled his wallet out and pulled it out of a fold, and he said, "I've kept it in my wallet ever since. Because anger is what I have a hard time struggling with."

People can review it later. They can put it on their windshield, or they can put it on their refrigerator door, or even in the gutter!

- **It can be the basis for small group discussions.**

If you give an outline, they can use it for Bible discussion groups, small groups during the week.

- **It allows you to use multiple translations.**

Sometimes, that makes all the difference in the world, because no translation says every verse equally clear. And so sometimes you say, oh, I like the way that translation says that. It just really grips you, grabs you.

- **It increases participation.**

It increases participation because people can circle words. They can underline words. They can star things, just like I have been having you do.

Now, let me say that it's very important that if you use a fill-in the blanks on your outline, make sure that the blanks really do matter. Rick Muchow told me one time he did some music for a church, and he said the blanks were "A," "A," and "the." So when you've got a blank for them to fill in, what do you leave blank? Well, first, you usually leave the most important word blank. The most important word. Or you leave the blank that would create the most suspense. The most important word or the one that would create the most suspense. I don't very often like to leave the first word blank, unless it's an acrostic, because it's easier to help them know what point you're on by giving them the first word of the sentence that you're going to fill in.

9. Trim your content!

To simplify your messages you edit out all the unnecessary material. You take out the unnecessary words. You reduce the verbiage. If you can say something in seven words, for heaven's sake, don't say it in twenty. Say it short, succinct. One of the major differences between good messages and great messages – a great message has been trimmed so there is no fat on it. Every statement, every word is solid, lean, it's meat, it's muscle, it's Bam! Bam! Bam! You're not just using filler and fluff. You've trimmed all of that out. You reject any unrelated material. It may be funny but if it doesn't fit the point you don't throw it in. You've got to know why you're doing what you're doing for every single point if you're going to be a purpose driven preacher.

- **TRIM THE # OF VERSES YOU WILL USE.**

This is very hard for me to do. I always have far more scripture than I can possibly use. My outlines, I average between a dozen and fourteen verses per message. But I might have studied for a typical message 50 or 60 different verses and I might have actually chosen 20 or 25 and in my first run through the outline I have 25 verses there. I know I can't use them all but when you've researched them and you've done the work you don't want to give them up. It's like a baby that you've birthed. And there are so many great verses in God's word and you find one good verse then you find fifteen and you want to share all fifteen! But you don't need to. It's a very difficult task.

This is the worst part of sermon preparation for me. I hate to trim. If it's something I've found, I want to throw that one more verse in there. So I'm not a very good judge at picking which verse should be left out. I usually ask my wife. She's much more objective. She's not as attached to those verses as I am. She didn't spend as many hours as I did finding them. So I'll take it to Kay and say, "I've got five verses here on this point and obviously I can only use two of them," or sometimes even just one of them. She will help me by being objective. You need to get somebody like that who can kind of help you do surgery on the parts that you really want to keep but need to be kept out or otherwise you're going to be way over time.

- **TRIM BACKGROUND MATERIAL.**

I hate to tell you this, but your members aren't nearly as fascinated by archaeology and linguistics as you are. I know you like that but they're just not that interested in it.

Here's my rule for you. Do as much background study as you can during your exegesis. But share as little as possible in the message. The background really is more for you than it is for them. Remember your purpose is not to teach them the background of every passage. Your purpose is to change lives. That's the purpose of the Bible. The purpose of the Bible is not to teach us background about where Troas was. It's just not the purpose. If you spend five minutes explaining where Troas was and the history of Troas and all that kind of stuff, you're missing the point.

When I go to a doctor, I'm not interested in knowing how he came to the diagnosis. I just want to know his diagnosis. I don't want to know all the steps. I just want him to look at me and say, "You've got a runny nose! And here's what you can take to get rid of it."

You don't have to explain everything in your text to the congregation. That is a very important rule to remember. Just because it's in the text, does not mean you have to explain every detail and minutiae in the text. You don't have to say everything about everything in the verse.

A lot of pastors do what I call Old Mother Hubbard preaching. That is where you use every part of the verse to pontificate about something. "Old Mother Hubbard went to the cupboard to get her poor dog a bone..... Old... Think of that word "old". We ought to respect old age. China respects old age. India respects old age. All great cultures respect old people. ... Old Mother.... Think about your mother. Think about John Wesley's mother... Think about the mother of all wars...." And you go on and on. "Hubbard... Did you know that the Latin root word for Hubbard is the word "rock" which reminds us of the Rock of ages." Then notice, "Old Mother Hubbard went to the cupboard... She went all the way. She persevered. She must have been a Calvinist. She went all the way to the cupboard. She didn't go half way. She persevered."

What you're doing there is assigning more truth to the text than God intended. You're taking a verse and you're pontificating on every single word and going in deep background and people are saying, "He's deep!" You can actually miss the point of the message, the point of the text by doing that. You give everything equal value. In fact, some things that are actually minutiae you give more value.

Today, you've got to get to the point quicker. In 1983 there was a famous article by Robert McNeal of the McNeal-Lear report he called "Is TV shortening America's attention span?" The answer is Yes! It is. Would you like me to show you your single greatest enemy? The greatest enemy of the pastor is the channel changer, the flipper. Every time you start going down one of those detours they're thinking, "Let's watch something else!" Click! Click! Click!

Teaching Tip

If you have a T.V. remote available, bring it and show it here. It's amazing in the age of Power Point presentations and computer graphics how the simple illustration of showing some object in your hand is still the most powerful object lesson of all.

They don't bring these but their eyes are showing it. They're clicking out on your message. People have been conditioned by this thing to be impatient. If you don't grab their attention instantly, you lose them.

I'll say it again. You may not like that but that's the culture you have to minister in. It doesn't seem fair that I should have to immediately grab them but I do if I'm going to minister in the 21st century. You want to trim out any background material because they're conditioned to be impatient.

**Warning: Describing too much detail of a text can actually
hide or dilute the power of the text!**

You pay too much interest to secondary issues. If you see eleven things in a verse you're seeing way too much.

**More does not mean better!
Slower does not mean deeper!**

What I'm attacking here right now is a very popular myth among preachers and among members too. That is that the slower you go the deeper you are. The really deepest guys are the guys that take six weeks on two verses. Guys who take six weeks on two verses what they're doing is taking one word and doing a topical message on it. Then taking another word and doing a topical message on it. Then another word. They're calling it verse by verse because that's the proper term – expository preaching. If you're spending six weeks on two verses, you're doing topical preaching. Don't call it verse by verse. You're doing topical because you're using it as a springboard to everything else. A lot of the "best" expository preachers are really topical. They're just using the verse. They start with the verse to spring off to somewhere else.

If you spend a year in the book of Jude and someone says, "Wow! He's deep!" No. He just missed the point of Jude. He's chasing rabbits.

Juan Carlos Ortiz says in his book *"All of us are familiar with informational teaching. Most Bible studies are informational type teaching. Information is not bad but it's the minimum way of teaching. It's basic ministry is simply to inform and in doing so awaken interest in the things that you are informed about. Unfortunately the church has made informational teaching an end in itself. We know the words of the Bible, the books of the Bible, the history of the Bible, the teaching of the Bible, but we know them for no higher purpose than showing off our knowledge to one another. Information is good as a means but not as an end. And Jesus almost never used this teaching method yet Jesus prepared the best ministers in the world."*

Many of our Bible studies instead of making things simple and clear actually make them more confused. Suppose I'm in Rome and I write a letter to my friend Bob. 'Dear Brother Bob, I write this letter to you from Rome. I have arrived with my wife and children and we have seen 'this and that' and I write a long letter. When Bob received the letter he quickly goes to the church and says, 'Brethren we have received a letter from Brother Juan Carlos Ortiz and I've talked to the committee on religious education and I believe that we should study this letter at length. Therefore during the next three months we will study the epistle of Juan Carlos.'

So the first Sunday all the people gather and Bob begins his teaching. 'This letter starts like this, "Dear brother Bob." Dear in the Greek means a person who is loved. So when Bob is very dear he means "loved one, dear!" I can just imagine my brother Juan taking the pen and saying, "Dear!" His heart is overflowing with love. His wife is beside him joining him in love. How do you write your letters? Do you put "Dear" in your letters? All of us must say it together... "Dear". But wait! There's more. He says "Dear Bob." He calls me by name. He knows me. He really means it when he says, "Dear Bob" because he says I am a friend of his. Do you say "Dear"? and do you call people by their name? "Dear Bob, I write." He himself is writing. He doesn't have a secretary. He has nobody writing for him. He is writing himself. Well, next Thursday we're going to continue with the epistle of Juan Carlos. Now let's stand for our closing prayer.' So next Thursday comes and he says, "I write from Rome." Rome. Rome, the city founded by Romulus and Remus whom the wolves fed. It was the capital city of the Roman empire built on seven hills. The Roman Empire was divided into two regions – the eastern and western divisions. Many scholars believe that Rome did not fall because of its lack of military strength but because of its moral decay. Now the next verse...."

And the people say, "Our pastor really goes deep. With one verse he can have two or three classes. What a tremendous pastor. What a scholar!" Yet after three months spent picking apart the epistle of Juan Carlos just like that, nobody really knows what the letter is all about.

But that's the way we teach the Bible. I imagine that when we get to heaven Paul will call most of us Bible teachers over to one side and say, "Listen! I never said what you taught!"

People don't care about the nuances of the text. They care about what's happening in their lives. Jesus never spoke about nuances. Do you want to be like Jesus? He never spoke about nuances of the text. What do you call a sermon that takes this kind of message and go all over it. That's a topical message.

I see Sunday morning kind of like an ER room. When people are bleeding to death you can't always deal with secondary issues. You get right to the point and you've got to stop the bleeding. More does not mean better and slower does not mean deeper. To touch people you must move your preaching beyond the cognitive.

I like what Howard Hendricks says

"A lot of preaching has too much brains put into it, and not enough guts."
Howard Hendricks

Would you agree that we're an information overload age? There's just too much information. There's a glut of it. People do not need more information. People are not going to be looking for more information in the 21st century. It's everywhere and there's too much of it. What they're looking for is meaning. They want someone to interpret what it means. They want somebody to be a filter. They want somebody to figure it all out and say, "See all this that's happening in the world? This is what this means. See all this information? None of that is important but what's important is this part of it." If you as a pastor become a filter, if you as a pastor become an expert on meaning knowing the signs of the times and being able to say, "This is really what God is doing here," and being able to look at all the information both in God's word and in his creation and say, "Here is what God is doing through this," you will not lack an audience. People are hungry for meaning. They will flock to churches that are teaching them meaning not just giving them information.

There's so much information today people just shut down mentally. They can't handle it all, they can't hold it so they just tune out

- **TRIM YOUR POINTS.**

Puritan preachers, which I by the way, happen to love to read because they were so exhaustive. They would hit it 40, 50, 60 different ways. They would often have 30, 40 or 50 points in a message. That was a scholastic form of preaching that was developed during the Puritan age. It certainly wasn't New Testament preaching.

But today you can't do that any more. You have a different audience and exhaustive sermons are exhausting to the congregation. You have to limit the number of your points.

This is the principle of life that I call the Principle of Confinement. The Principle of Confinement is when you're able to package something confinement often produces power. For instance, when an artist confines his painting to a canvas – he doesn't go off the canvas – he gets a beautiful picture. He is confined to that canvas. When water is confined to one channel then

you could produce hydro electric power. You force all the water through one channel and it has far more power than if there are no banks and it kind of goes wherever it wants to. When a pianist confines his playing to the score he gets beautiful music. If he has no score and he just goes everywhere he has nothing. Just sound. When air is compressed, confined, it has enormous power. You can have a pneumatic drill.

So anything that you can compress actually becomes more powerful. That's why something that's said in a paragraph that's stated in a slogan, the slogan always has more power than a paragraph. A one liner always has more power than a paragraph. It's pithy, catchy. It's summarized truth. It's condensed. It's a nugget that everybody can grasp on to. You want to trim your points, maybe reduce some down. They may be a good point but still you've got to throw it out because you can't have everything.

- **TRIM YOUR QUOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS.**

Sometimes you'll read a quote out of a quote dictionary or book or you'll see a quote from somebody else's message and it's some archaic quote but it's got a kernel of truth in it. What do you do? Don't quote that guy. They don't even know who he is anyway. Summarize it and make it a shorter pithy statement and you say it. The way they said it with the thee's and the thou's, or it's all extended, it's a good point but it's not confined enough. So you trim it down.

One of the most common mistakes that pastors do is telling too many details in an illustration. You water the illustration down. I don't know if you're trying to stretch it for time or whatever. But you can milk an illustration. You can make it go two minutes or five minutes. You'll be much more effective if you condense it. You don't draw it out. You trim all you can.

Trim your content so that the message is more simple. What's the simplest way to say it...

Saddleback church is in a congressional district that is the second most educated district in America. More people with higher education degrees than almost anywhere else in the country. When I first started preaching here I tried to be very profound. I'm not. I'm not profound. I am simple. I have discovered that the simpler I get the more God blesses it. God has not called me to feed intellectual giraffes but sheep. So I try to make it real simple. Simple isn't shallow. It's not simplistic. It's just understandable.

The next question you want to ask when I'm dealing with preparing my delivery is...

VII. WHAT IS THE MOST PERSONAL WAY TO SAY IT?

I used to ask, What is the most powerful way to say this point? And learned over the years that the most powerful way is the most personal and the most personal is the most powerful. When you talk about your life and when you talk about their life in a personal way it's going to have power. It's going to have impact. That's the secret of Paul. Notice he says

"We have spoken frankly to you, we have opened our hearts wide." 2 Cor. 6:11(GN)

Sharing personally has tremendous impact. You are far more effective as a witness than as an orator. Today the most powerful form of advertising is still personal testimony. "I tried Tide! You ought to try it too!" Why are they still doing that? Because it works. Personal testimony is the most powerful form of advertising.

That's the difference between the apostles and the Pharisees. The apostles shocked the world because they spoke from personal experience. The Pharisees always spoke in footnotes. The Pharisees said, "Now, Gamaliel says this, and the rabbis say this..." The apostles came along and said, "All I know is I was blind and now I see." How do you argue with that? Speak in a personal way.

"We were delighted to share with you, not only the gospel of God but our own lives as well." 1 Thess. 2:8 (NIV)

You want to speak it in a personal way. In preaching, ideas have to become personal if they're going to become dynamic.

I'm going to give you three words and then I want you to tell me how they hit you emotionally: photosensitivity, thermodynamic heat transfer, hydraulic pressure. Doesn't that just put a quiver in your liver?? Does that create a word picture? No. Because it's not personal.

Let me say the same three things in a personal way: "It was dark, her hand felt warm and his pulse was rising." Which has more impact? Which one can you visualize?

The effects of television today is that people are more skeptical - and resistance to sales pitches is universal.

Effect of TV: People are more SKEPTICAL.

So impact is no longer a matter of volume. It used to be that if you had a weak point you could write in your notes, "Weak point. Yell here!" And a lot of pastors would "Yell it like it is" thinking "if I just turn up the volume then it will have impact in people's lives."

Not so today. In fact, people are more resistant to the volume factor. Would you rather talk to a hard sell or a soft sell salesman? No doubt about it. Hard sell does not work in America any more because of television.

Dr. Flavil Yeakley's Ph.D. Dissertation:

In 1976 there was a dissertation done called "The Three types of Evangelistic Communicator," and three different types of preachers.

Three Types of Evangelistic Communicators:

1. **"Manipulative Monologue" (salesman preacher) hard sell, heavy persuasion, pressure**
2. **"Information Transmission" (teaching preacher) emphasize Bible knowledge and information, understanding certain facts/doctrines**
3. **"Non-Manipulative Dialogue" (friend/relational preacher)**

After he classified these three different kinds of preachers he then studied over 1000 churches and here were the amazing results.

Yeakley then studied over 1,000 churches: RESULTS

Regarding Evangelism

- In High Growth Churches ALL pastors were #3
(Non-Manipulative dialogue)

In high growth churches where there was a lot of growth, all of the pastors were number three. The friendship or relational preachers where he preached friend to friend, relational, kind of animated conversation. Not oratory but energetic conversation. All pastors in high growth churches were the third type.

- In Medium Growth Churches 94% pastors were #1
(Salesman monologue)

In medium growth churches 94% of them were number one – hard sell, salesman, monologue type preacher. Which means you can get moderate growth preaching in the old style of heavy-duty sales approach.

- In Low Growth Churches 87% pastors were #2
(Information transmitters)

In low growth churches 87% of the pastors were number two – the information transmitters. Just present it without a whole lot of emotion teaching style

He then discovered that in regards to preaching style that

Regarding Preaching Style

- High Growth – 97% pastors were perceived as POSITIVE in their preaching.
- Medium Growth – 81% pastors were perceived as NEGATIVE in their preaching.
- Low Growth – 75% pastors were perceived as NEGATIVE in their preaching.

So if you want maximum growth you're going to have to be a positive, personal, friendly, relationally style preacher.

HOW TO PREACH WITH IMPACT

1. Honestly share your struggles and weaknesses.

"I think you ought to know, dear brothers, about the hard time we went through in Asia. We were really crushed and overwhelmed, and feared we would never live through it." 2 Cor 1:8 (TLB)

Don't try to hide them. Be transparent. This is confessional preaching and confessional preaching always lends toward credibility. It encourages others when they're tempted to give up.

I remember one time preaching on anger in your words. I remember saying, "It bothers me that sometimes I say the most hurtful things to the people I love the most – my wife and my kids. Does that bother anybody else?" Everybody in their hearts is thinking, "Yeah. How many times have I said hurtful unkind things to the people I love the most?" I could have said, "Why do you talk like that to your wife and your children?" And immediately the barriers go up. But when I said, "Sometimes I say the most hurtful things to the people I love the most. And that bothers me." Then everybody's following right along because you're sharing your struggle, your weaknesses.

Teaching Tip

At this point, it is vital that you tell a story of how God has worked in your life even through your failure, your struggles, your lack of faith or your hurt. You must honestly share your struggles and weaknesses.

We do a series on marriage at Saddleback about every other year we come back to that theme. When I talk about marriage I talk about the problems Kay and I had in our marriage. When we got married, we were in love with each other and felt God had called us together. We were committed Christians. Kay's dad was a pastor. My dad was a pastor. But we did not get along. That's an understatement. My wife and I are the exact opposite in everything in life except in our commitment to Jesus Christ and love for each other. We're polar opposites. Any Myers-Briggs would have told you how our marriage would have been a disaster. And in the early years it was. We started arguing major on the honeymoon. And to put it politely, our first two years of marriage was hell on earth! Literally. We couldn't get on with our marriage and we couldn't get out of our marriage. We had made a commitment. We're not going to get a divorce even if this thing kills us and it nearly did. My wife thought she was going nuts from the tension. I got so sick internalizing my anger the first year of marriage I ended up in the hospital. And both of us felt cheated like we didn't know what we'd gotten into. We were miserable. I was a youth pastor then. Where does a pastor go for marriage counseling? And of course 25 years ago it wasn't as accepted as it is today. We were in love and we'd locked the escape hatch. We said divorce is not an option. We're going to have to make this thing work.

Finally after two very miserable years of hell on earth, we scraped up some money and said, We're going to go get counseling. We went to a Christian counselor that cost \$100 a week. I was making \$800 a month teaching at a Christian college so half of my income was going to counseling. I took a MasterCard and we racked up a 1500 bill on the credit card. Fifteen weeks of it. I should do a commercial: MasterCard saved my marriage. I don't understand when people say, "We can't afford to get counseling." How much is your happiness worth? You can't afford not to get counseling.

I'd pay a million bucks for what I've got today. Two million. Today my wife is my best friend. She is my lover, my confidant, my marriage partner, co-founder of Saddleback church. There wouldn't be a Saddleback church without my wife. I'd rather spend time with her than anybody else. I love her with all my life. I am so glad we did not give up on our marriage. I am so glad that we had made a commitment that said, "Til death do us part." And I know in the wisdom of God's goodness and grace see why he put two people who were exact opposites together.

People who are exact opposites have great potential for growth. I have learned more from my wife than any other person on this planet. And I'm sure she'd say the same thing. I would say that we have an incredible marriage. No marriage is perfect and we still fight and we still differ, we still irritate each other. But I am deliriously in love with my wife after 25 years. Our marriage is stronger, happier more fulfilling and I'm not just shining you on and I'm not just building her up. I really mean that. I'd walk out of here and go talk to her in a second!

When I start talking about marriage problems, and I start dealing like that on a personal basis, it gets really quiet. And it gets everybody's attention. It got yours. Did you notice how quiet it got when I started talking about marriage problems? Why? Name me a marriage that hasn't had problems. You married a sinner and she married a bigger one. So you're going to have problems. You did not marry a saint. You married a sinner.

That has a ring of authority. It has a ring of authenticity. The most personal way is the most powerful. When you start talking like that you know what kind of hope that gives to marriages in our church? That there were days I'd want to kill my wife! Really. Every bone in my body wanted out of that marriage and she did too. But we had made a commitment before God and God took us through tough times and made an incredible marriage. That gets people's attention.

Some of you may be needing to get some marriage counseling, by the way. I would say that may be the thing that makes your marriage and makes your ministry. Really. Maybe you need to get up some things at home before God can put His hand of blessing on your church. Maybe you need to work out some issues there. You did not marry a person by accident. They are God's will for your life. And God gave you that husband and gave you that wife for a reason so stop being stubborn and start learning.

Honestly share your struggles and weaknesses. I would like to recommend one tape. I've tried not to do this because I hate infomercial seminars but there is one tape I want to ask you to buy at pastors.com. It's a two-part series tape. It's the story behind the story of my thorn in the flesh. I don't have time to share with you about my thorn in the flesh but I will tell you that the thing God blesses the most in my life – preaching – also causes the greatest single pain in my life because of a physical handicap that I've struggled with since I was born. I was born with a brain disorder. You can get the tape and hear about it. The very thing that God uses. It always amazes me that guys would come and learn to preach from me who the very thing that God blesses in my life is the thing that causes the most pain in my life. If you want to know the inside story of what really goes on in my life, I'd encourage you to get that tape.

The secret of great communication is the ability to drop your mask. It's the ability to share your real emotions. People catch your heart, they catch your spirit. You don't do this by yelling at people. You bring them in close and you talk to them heart to heart, soul to soul. You bear your emotions. You let people see what you're feeling on the inside and that's what has impacted people's lives.

2. Honestly share where you are making progress.

Paul says

“In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.” (Titus 2:7-8 NIV)

“And here you yourself must be an example to them of good deeds of every kind. Let everything you do reflect your love of the truth and the fact that you are in dead earnest about it.” (Titus 2:7 TLB)

I love Paul's honesty. He said, I was so distressed, I was so discouraged, so depressed I was ready to kick the bucket. Ever been that way? Have you ever felt like you weren't going to make it? Have you ever felt suicidal? Paul is so authentic he writes it down for posterity and 2000 years later we're reading about his problems of depression. He's saying that's how depressed I was.

Now, honestly share where you're making progress, he says *“When we brought you the good news it was not just meaningless chatter to you. No, you listened with great interest. And what we told you produced a powerful effect upon you. You know how our very lives were further proof to you of the truth of our message.”*

People grow best by models. Paul said, *“Follow me as I follow Christ.”* About four times he says that in the New Testament. I used to read that and think, “I could never say that! I could never stand up in front of my church and say, ‘Follow Rick Warren as Rick Warren follows Christ.’” Paul, you're being egotistical there. You're being arrogant. I wouldn't ever presume to do that.”

But then I realized that Paul understood human behavior. Human behavior is that people learn best through models. You don't have to be perfect to be a model. You just have to be one step ahead. I realize now that I'd rather have people following me than some rock star. At least I'm making an attempt to live a righteous life. I am far from perfect but I'm at least trying. And the direction of my heart is I do want to serve Jesus Christ. So I don't apologize now in saying, “I am a model.” And the longer I preach the more I'm convinced of the truth that the minister is the message. Your primary calling is to model the message. You are to incarnate the truth. The word must become flesh. Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 1:5 *“Our lives were proof to you.”* His words were thunder because his life was lightning. The Bible tells us in Hebrews 13:7 *“Remember your leaders who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.”*

Jesus demonstrated incarnational preaching. “The word became flesh.” You need to understand that in the 21st century, mass media has permanently altered the source of credibility in the world today. TV has changed communication. What validates the message today is not the text but the messenger in today's world. People aren't saying today, “Is the Bible believable?” They want to know, “Are you believable? Do you have credibility?” If you don't have credibility I don't care if you're holding up the eternal word of God, they're not going to listen to you. The minister is the message. And I basically realize that what I do from week to week is stand up and say, “Here's how Rick Warren got through another week. Here's how I'm learning with Jesus Christ. Here's the things I'm learning. Here's the things God is teaching me. Here's the mistakes I've learned from.” If you're not modeling the message, you're not ready to preach. There's a word for that: hypocrisy.

3. Share what you are currently learning

Pass on the insights that God is teaching you right now. Impact is caused by conviction and when you are learning something it creates conviction in your life. After you've got it down, sometimes you don't have so much strong conviction about it. So I like to pass on to people the things I'm learning right now.

1 Thessalonians tells us:

“Our gospel came to you...with deep conviction.” 1 Thess. 1:5a

Conviction is if I am gripped by it then you are going to be gripped by it. On the other hand, if I'm not gripped by it, if I don't have any conviction about it, you're not going to get any conviction about it. So I have a simple rule:

MY RULE: If I don't FEEL it, I FORGET IT!

When I'm studying a passage and it's not moving me I pray, “God, this obviously isn't the passage You want me to speak on.”

The last question that I ask myself when we're dealing with delivery is

VIII. WHAT IS THE MOST INTERESTING WAY TO SAY IT?

I cannot over emphasize the importance of choosing just the right word in preparing your preaching. Look at this statement of J.B. Phillips. He wrote the Phillip's paraphrase.

***“If words are to enter people's hearts and bear fruit, they must be the right words, shaped to pass defenses and explode silently and effectually within their minds.”
J.B. Phillips***

What a word picture. It's like a stealth bomb flying under the radar, shaped to get past defenses and explode silent and effectively——effectually within their minds. This is where you need to develop your skills as a wordsmith. I said earlier, a lot of pastors have pretty good content, but they don't know how to turn a phrase. They haven't developed this skill yet of saying it in a way that people go, “oh, I got that,” or “I like that.”

CHOOSING JUST THE RIGHT WORDS

“When wise people speak, they make knowledge attractive...” Prov. 15:2 (GN)

Can you do that? Do you make knowledge attractive?

“A wise, mature person is known for his understanding. The more pleasant his words, the more persuasive he is.” Prov. 16:21 (GN)

The more pleasant his words, the more persuasive he is.

Do you do that? Interesting teachers are wise teachers. It's dumb to bore people with the Bible.

I work very hard at being interesting. Colossians 4:5-6 (Good News)

“Be pleasant and hold their interest when you speak the message. Choose your words carefully and be ready to give answers to anyone who asks questions.”

Col. 4:6 (CEV)

Choose your words carefully. And be ready to give answers to anyone who asks questions. How you say it matters. It matters dramatically. If you were in a foreign country, you'd have to learn their language in order to speak. And in the 21st century, people don't use the same terms as in the 16th century. They don't even use the same terms as in the first half of this last century, the early 20th century. If I want to reach unchurched people, then I have to communicate in their language. I'm a missionary. I'm a translator. I have to talk like they talk. Otherwise, it isn't going to get through. That's not compromising the message. In fact, that's valuing the message. When I continue to use a style of communication that's outdated, I am devaluing the message by using a style that is out of date. When I use an up-to-date, current, contemporary style of communicating I am valuing the message and saying, "this is so important, it's worth the time for me to translate it." If I refuse to learn the language of people I want to communicate with, I'm the one compromising. I'm compromising the message because I'm allowing my own stubbornness, my own arrogance, my own lack of love, and my own unwillingness to change to cloud the message.

HOW YOU SAY IT MATTERS!

Let's read these verses together. From Colossians 4:6

"Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt..." Col. 4:6 (RSV)

That's the flavoring. Read it with me out of the Jerusalem Bible.

"Talk to them agreeably and with a flavor of wit, and try to fit your answers to the needs of each one." Col. 4:6 (JB)

Now, in any meal, you have to have some flavoring. The flavoring is not the meat. It's not the meat of the message, but it does make the meat taste better.

"For the Preacher was not only a wise man but a good teacher; he not only taught what he knew to the people, but taught them in an interesting manner."
Eccl. 12:10 (LB)

I put a definition

"Capturing and holding the attention for an extended period of time"

How many of you would like to do that with your teaching, capture and hold attention for an extended period of time. I have just given to you Webster's definition of the word "entertainment".

=the definition of ENTERTAINMENT.

That's what entertainment is. Entertainment is simply capturing and holding the attention for an extended period of time.

A sermon is not a comedy club. But it doesn't have to be dry to be spiritual. We should never be afraid of being interesting. I have actually heard pastors proudly proclaim, "No, we're not

here to entertain!” and obviously they’re doing a pretty good job of it because Gallup according to his poll says that Americans say the most boring place to be is in church. So we’re doing a great job of not entertaining. We’re not capturing and holding attention for an extended period of time.

In today’s culture, dull preaching is: INEXCUSABLE.

To the unchurched dull preaching is unforgivable. The cardinal sin of preaching is to be boring. My dad who preached for fifty years said, “Son, if you don’t hit oil after twenty minutes stop boring.”

People will put up with heresy as long as it’s interesting. Listen to some of the preachers on TV.

My wife, a few years ago, I walked in and she was standing in front of the television, glued to the set, watching one of these guys. I’m not going to mention his name but his initials are Gene Scott. Have you seen this guy? He’s always smoking a stogie, and cussin’ and he’s got these babes in tight skirts on the front row saying, I’m going to hold my breath for thirty minutes if you don’t give another hundred grand. I walked in and she’s watching this guy hold his breath and smoke while he’s waiting for more money to come in. I said, “Why?” She said, “It’s kind of like watching a lizard. It’s fascinating and revolting at the same time.”

Our message is too important to deliver with a take it or leave it attitude. It is a sin to bore people with the Bible. Why? Because if you preach a boring sermon the problem is they don’t think you’re boring. They think God is boring. And that is an insult to the name of God.

HOW TO KEEP IT INTERESTING

1. Vary YOUR DELIVERY!

Speed, cadence, volume. The difference between a good sermon and a great sermon is delivery. For years I have preached multiple services to multiple audiences. For five years I preached the same message to four different audiences. And now I’m preaching the same message to five different audiences. Delivery makes the difference. It’s the exact same material shared at all five services but the way you deliver it determines whether you get to first base or you knock it out of the park. Same content. It’s delivery that makes the difference.

Teaching Tip

In this next section, you’ll want to use your voice to illustrate what you are saying about delivery as you say it. When you talk about a monotone preacher, say the words “nothing is more boring than a monotone preacher who gets on a note and he gets stuck at that level and he keeps preaching and you wonder if he’s ever going to come up for breath...” all in a dull monotone. Likewise, when you talk about slow speakers, speak slowly; when you talk about fast preachers, talk too quickly, etc. There are notes in the section that follows on the sentences to do this.

If the session is being translated, your translator will appreciate a warning in advance of what you intend to do in this part of the session!

(monotone) Nothing is more boring than a monotone preacher who gets on a note and he gets stuck at that level and he keeps preaching and you wonder if he's ever going to come up for breath. (stop monotone) It gets boring.

(slow) Some men speak so slow it is like Chinese water torture – drip – drip. (stop slow)

The average speaker speaks 150 words a minute and the average person can listen to 500 words a minute so speed it up.

(Fast) On the other hand some guys talk so fast it's like the Federal Express guy. You know he's saying words, but they're coming at you so fast it feels like Peter Piper Picked a Peck of Pickled peppers. (stop fast) You may need to slow down.

Vary your rate. Varying your rate – fast, slow, loud, soft – creates interest. (get louder with each phrase in the next sentence) Some guys start loud, they stay loud and they get louder. And by the end of the message your ears are going Wow! It's way overboard. Some of you guys are still copying a style of preaching that Billy Sunday did in the 1930s. You yell your sermon. Billy Sunday had to yell. He didn't have a microphone. Because you have them you can now hear a whisper. And you don't have to talk real loud because people can hear you when you whisper.

Sometimes the most forceful thing is (long pause, and then say the word) ...silence. The dramatic pause. The difference between a homerun and a foul ball is timing. In preaching timing is everything. That's why you need to listen to good preachers not just read their books. Listen to good preachers to learn timing.

A university study discovered that only 7% of a speaker's impact was from content (what is said), 38% is from audio qualities (how you sound, vocal tones, speed, articulation, pauses), but 55% of your impact as a speaker is visual (how you look, how you act, your facial gestures and expressions and things like that). Vary your delivery.

2. Never make a point without A PICTURE.

Never make a point without a picture. For every exhortation you provide an illustration. It's like layering a cake – exhortation, illustration, exhortation, illustration... Never make a point without a picture. Sometimes you can use visual aids. If you use video clips, you don't have to make up the video clips yourself. Others have made some great clips.

A picture is always better than a definition. If you can't illustrate it either it's untrue or you don't understand it. Stop and think through your illustrations. You want to give them a point for their head and a picture for their heart.

"If you think the gathering of biblical facts and standing up with a Bible in your hand will automatically equip you to communicate well, you are deeply mistaken. It will not. You must work at being interesting. Boredom is a gross violation, being dull is a grave offense, and irrelevance is a disgrace to the Gospel. Too often these three crimes go unpunished and we preachers are the criminals." **Chuck Swindoll**

Abstractions without illustrations become obstructions.

In Jesus' sermon on the mount He didn't discuss Hebrew history or Greek words for worry. He talked about birds and lilies of the field and houses built on sand. He gave visual images that people could understand. He didn't go into all kinds of scholastic things. He did pictures. Tell stories. Give illustrations. Be specific in your illustration. Don't say, "Recently a friend of mine went to a certain city, a nearby town..." and they're wondering, "Does he work for the CIA?" Say, "John went over to Phoenix, Arizona and did this..."

In 1974 I was a short-term summer missionary to Japan. I arrived in Tokyo, and they put me on the fastest train in the world at that time, the Shinkansen, which goes from one end of Japan to the other end of Japan. It's called the bullet train because it can go up to almost 200 miles an hour. It's a very, very fast train. There were several tunnels that were actually dug through mountainsides that the train would go through. Even speeding at a couple hundred miles an hour, it would sometimes take 30 or 40 minutes to get through that tunnel. I did not like that. We were speeding at, a couple hundred miles an hour and still in total darkness, under the mountain, totally in the dark for 30 or 40 minutes.

Ever been in a sermon like that?

A sermon without illustrations is like being in a tunnel for 40 minutes. People get uncomfortable. Just as I got uncomfortable on that train, people get uncomfortable. It's a message that has no light shining in, no windows. No doors to let fresh air in, just the hot air of the preacher. Illustrations are windows. Notice that I used illustrations in a quote from Chuck Swindoll and that illustration about the train in Japan. They allow light in.

SUGGESTIONS

- **Throw away OLD ILLUSTRATION BOOKS**

They're about dead people nobody's ever heard of. The best source of illustration is your newspaper, your magazines, television. Remember your purpose in illustrating is not to educate your people to the finer culture of life. Your purpose to illustrating is to relate a truth to something they're familiar with. I don't use much poetry because my people aren't reading poetry and I don't quote classic novels because my people aren't reading classic novels. They're watching TV. In the early 90s I'd be more likely to quote Seinfeld not Shakespeare. I would quote "Home Improvement" not some well known novel. You quote Larry King, not King Edward. They don't even know who King Edward is.

- **Best sources: TV, MAGAZINES, NEWS, INTERNET, LIFE!**

News, life situations. Those are the sources you need to be looking at

- **Check your motive WHEN USING PERSONAL ILLUSTRATIONS**

It's real easy to make yourself the hero of every illustration, or make your children the hero of every illustration. It can turn into self promotion.

- **Get permission FROM YOUR FAMILY**

And, again, be careful about using too many cute kid stories. It's kind of like my dad used to say before he died, he said elderly people used to come and say, have I shown you my grandkids pictures? Told you about my grandkids? And he said "no, and I appreciate it."

- **Tell HUMAN INTEREST STORIES.**

People are interested in people, in stories about real life and real families. The most powerful stories are often the simple stories of what happened to you or a family that you know that week.

The most popular magazines today are the people magazines. They're human interest stories. And you've got to admit that sometimes those stories are interesting.

I know none of you read *National Enquirer* and *The Midnight Tattler*. They always put them right up front of the grocery store and you've got to admit that some of those headlines are pretty interesting. I remember the other day I was walking by and there was an *Enquirer* headline like "Three headed dog who looks like a man comes back from Mars and has a baby girl." You've got to admit that's interesting. And you're wondering... but being a pastor I can't let anybody see me reading that kind of material so I'm kind of pushing the cart, looking over my shoulder, trying to read it as I go by. It's fascinating.

Have you ever noticed when you're preaching and you tell a story, everybody perks up. When you finish the story, they all go back to sleep! They like to hear the story.

Teaching Tip

Make sure to include examples of "non-verbal" communication in this section on delivery. For instance, when you talk about "perking up" here, you can act like you are waking up, and when you talk about falling back asleep act like you're falling back asleep. When the seminar is being translated, it's amazing how much you can communicate with these non-verbal cues even when the listeners may not understand your words until they are translated.

- **Tell the truth**

That's an obvious one. Resist the temptation to embellish or to embezzle a story. If you're telling a story about you family, and you tell it differently in the service that your wife attends – that should tell you something!

- **Think through YOUR TRANSITION**

In and out of your illustrations.

- **Eliminate NON-ESSENTIAL DETAILS**

Shorten it. A story that takes too long to tell will detract from the message and nonessential details can weaken it and bore the listeners. So don't tell all the details in the story. Just get it to the point.

- **Use DRAMATIC STORIES SPARINGLY**

Guys, you can't cry every week. Okay?

Jesus told stories. He was the master storyteller. He'd say, "Did you hear the one about..." and then He'd use a story. Notice Matthew 13

***"Jesus constantly used these illustrations when speaking to the crowds.
In fact...he never spoke to them without at least one illustration."
Matt. 13:34-35 (LB)***

Do you want to be like Jesus in your preaching? Use illustrations. You need to tell parables. You need to tell stories. Tell them from your life situation.

I sat on the back row of my preaching class in seminary and I can't tell you how many times the preaching professor would stand up and say, "Gentlemen, don't tell stories! Just get up and preach the word. Don't get off in all these stories. Just get up and preach the word." I'm sitting back there thinking, he's denying the very method that the master communicator used. In fact, the Bible says about Jesus, *"Without a parable He spake not unto them."* He never spoke without telling a story. They were telling me to not use the very thing that Jesus used to communicate spiritual truths. Jesus was a master storyteller. It was His favorite method in communicating. Why? Because He knew that storytelling is the most effective and the most entertaining way to teach.

Dress your principles in personalities!

3. Use SPECIAL FEATURES

Now, there are many different kinds of special features that you can use to break up a message for tension and release. I used to not do this. I used to get up and preach 30, 40 minutes with nothing else. But now I've learned to use one of five different special features. It creates a tension. It keeps people listening, and it pounds in a point in a much more powerful way just talking through the points. What are the features we use here at Saddleback? Let me give them to you.

- **Testimonies**

Testimonies are one of the most powerful factors in Saddleback Church's growth. We began doing them, about 1990. I got to thinking, a lot of people use drama, and drama is one thing to do. But why would I use a fictional skit when I've got a real-life story sitting here in the church? And so I began to have people write out their story and fit them into the message in an appropriate spot. And, of course, over the years, they've gotten better and better. The bottom line is: your church is filled with stories that need to be told. The only problem is when testimonies are told, the wrong people are there to hear them. Usually testimonies are only told at a midweek service. Or maybe Sunday night every once in a while. And that's where you've got all the people who are already saved. You need to put those stories when you have the likelihood of having some unbelievers present. Here's the power of a testimony. When I stand up to speak, an unchurched person comes in and he expects me to talk about God. He sees me as the paid professional. On the other hand, when somebody comes and shares their testimony, they are seen as the satisfied customer. Now, tell me, who has more credibility? The Paid professional or the satisfied customer? No doubt about it. And so when you're talking on anything, like trusting in Christ in a crisis, and you have somebody who just had a crisis share on that, that's powerful. When you talk about how Jesus Christ can release you from addiction and then you have a testimony of somebody who's been released from addiction, that's

powerful. When you talk about the difference Jesus Christ can make in your parenting skills and the way it will turn your family around, and you have a family that's been turned around and put back together and remarried because they came to Christ, that's powerful. And the bottom line is, what really attracts people to a church is changed lives. It's not buildings. It's not music. It's not preaching. Yes, those things do have a drawing power, but what is even greater than that is changed lives. And for 10 years, almost every week, we've had this constant parade of changed lives coming across this stage, one story after another. And people who come here for several weeks and then several months start getting the message, wow, people's lives really are changed around here. They hear one after another after another, and it's very, very powerful, and I would attribute that very factor, using testimonies as one of the primary reasons we have so many people come to Christ. It's a visual example of what Jesus Christ can do. And whatever we're teaching on, we will find an appropriate place to insert a testimony into the message. We have so many of these that we could show you, but I want to show you one we just had recently. A man who is a quadriplegic, whose life was turned upside down, and who found hope through Jesus' love.

((Testimony Video Here))

Teaching Tip

If you are teaching in a setting where you can use video, the videos mentioned in this section are available on the teaching DVD. If you are teaching in a different language or are being translated, experience has shown us that these videos do not translate well. Even if you use subtitles, the impact is so diminished that the illustration is lost. But if you are teaching to an English speaking audience, these are good illustrations of what you are here teaching.

Here is how I set that testimony up. I had gone two points into the message and then I said, now I want you to hear this. We played the video, Jim comes out. He gives a testimony. When he's through, you're ready to give an invitation.

Also, notice that he read the testimony. We always have them write their testimony out. Nobody just gets up and wings it. We work with them on it. We help them craft their testimony. They practice it and then we insert it into the message, and it's very powerful special feature.

- **Dramas**

And I'm not going into that in any more detail because you know there's lots of places you can get skits and dramas. We don't use drama that much. You just better have good actors if you're going to do drama. Otherwise, you can do more harm than good.

((VIDEOTAPE CLIP: EXAMPLE OF A SKIT))

- **Interviews**

You can do an interview three ways. You can do it live, you can do it by phone and you can do them by video. I was once getting ready to kick off a new series on the 10 Commandments and doing a message called Choosing My Standard. I had heard about a judge who was being thrown into court for putting up the 10 Commandments in his courtroom. I wanted to get that

guy's story. So I just tracked him down. Found out where he was – actually, got on the internet, found out where he lived, called the courthouse in that county and got him on Friday afternoon before the weekend message. We taped his interview on the phone. I got back to the internet, I find his picture on the internet. The next day we throw his picture up on the screen and I played his interview. He could never have come out here. But it was just another feature that you could fit the message in.

We have done interviews by video. We sometimes do man on the street interviews, where, we'll send a team out with a microphone, and ask something like "what is the purpose of life?" We'll ask a hundred different people at a mall then use the best two or three. We'll ask questions like: "Where do most people think they're going to go when they die?" Or like "what's the biggest question you'd you like to ask God?" Man on the street interviews are very effective in setting up a message for dealing with the questions that most people have.

((VIDEO CLIP: "MAN ON THE STREET" INTERVIEW))

- **Film Clips**

I did a Father's Day message a couple years ago, called Finding Time for What's Important. The points of the message were: line up your priorities, lighten up your attitude, and look up to God. And I used three different film clips of dads. I used Mr. Holland from Holland's opus. I used Mr. Robert Banks from Mary Poppins, and I used a dying dad in the movie Dad. I used the film clips to illustrate three reactions of fathers, illustrating the opposite of the very thing I was teaching on.

I was doing a series on different values that you need to hold and one of them was on developing trust. I said, "Sometimes it's difficult to show trust when you've been hurt in a bad way. We started the message with this.

((VIDEO CLIP OF MOVIE CLIPS FEATURING LINES ABOUT TRUST))

I once did a message on "Living With Integrity." I wanted to use the illustration of the ship the "Titanic."

When the Titanic set sail in 1912 it was called "unsinkable." That claim was based on technique of dividing the hull into compartments. The Idea was that some compartment could be flooded & still the ship would float. But now we all know that the Titanic hit an iceberg & 1,522 died. When the integrity of the ship was damaged – it sank! The idea that part of the ship could have integrity and the ship would not sink was simply not true. A hole in the boat is a hole in the boat is a hole in the boat. In many ways, your life is like a ship. If your integrity is damaged- your LIFE will sink!

I wanted to illustrate this point with a clip from TITANIC. But the movie had just come out and it would have been illegal! So our resourceful tech crew created a little parody for fun. The studios spent \$300 M. I gave our team a budget of \$3 bucks

((VIDEOTAPE CLIP: OUR TITANIC))

- **Point and Play**

A fifth feature you can use is what we call at Saddleback "point and play." It's a term Rick Muchow came up with, and point and play services are when we do songs interspersed between the points. This is the format we always use at Easter and always use on Christmas

Eve, because it maintains maximum attention. Instead of having, 20-30 minutes of music up front and then 30 minutes or 40 minutes of message behind it, we mix them together to keep interest. We'll start right off with an opening song and then I'll do a point, and then we'll sing. And then I'll do a point and we'll sing. I'll do a point and we'll sing. And sometimes the congregation sings. Sometimes it's a soloist.

We have found this to be very, very effective. In fact, the last three Easters, we have had over 1000 professions of faith over the last three Easters. It's like an evangelistic crusade - like a Billy Graham crusade - because our people bring their friends. By having this power impact of heart/head, heart/head, heart/head combination, it really captures people's attention, grips them to the message and makes it easier for them to comprehend what we're saying to them.

Sometimes we show a video while we are singing, and so it becomes actually a music video. During a message I did a while back on identifying yourself as a believer, and the importance of proclaiming your truth publicly, I talked about the importance of baptism. I told the people, "You need to be baptized to publicly express your commitment to Christ, and to say I'm not ashamed of Jesus Christ. A little boy once asked me, Pastor Rick, when can I get advertised? And that's pretty good, because that's what baptism is, it's an advertisement for Jesus. It's saying to the whole world, I am not ashamed to say that I am a follower of Jesus Christ. It's saying to the world, I'm not the same anymore. The old life is gone. I've been buried in the past, and I'm living a new life in Christ, and I'll never be the same." I said, "let's sing that song, I will never be the same." And we did it and did this video. In fact, we're going to do it right now. Sing this song.

((CLIP: I WILL NEVER BE THE SAME AGAIN Baptism
WITH LIVE MUSIC))

Now that, ladies and gentlemen, is why we do everything that we do. That is why we talked today about spending hours preparing messages that could change people's lives, because Jesus Christ has changed our lives. And I will never be the same again. And I'm glad. And I am glad. And this year, about 1600 people at Saddleback went through those waters. And that is worth every hour of study and crafting and sweat and worry and panic and searching and studying and reflecting and collecting and categorizing and applying and arranging and fashioning and forming. We don't do this so people will think, oh, we're great communicators. We do this because nothing changes the lives of people like Jesus Christ. Nothing.

4. Use HUMOR.

"Talk to (unbelievers) agreeably and with a flavor of wit, and try to fit your answers to the needs of each one." Col. 4:6 (JB)

I love that in the Jerusalem Bible

"A cheerful heart is good medicine..." Prov. 17:22 (NIV)

"The Son of man came enjoying life..." Luke 7:34 (Ph)

"The large crowd listened to Jesus with delight." Mark 12:37 (NIV)

Why? Because He was funny!

Jesus used humor in His teaching.

Elton Trueblood wrote a whole book on it The Humor of Christ. John Drakeford did too The Humor of Christ. The problem is we don't recognize the humor of Jesus. Did you know that the Sermon on the Mount has a number of laugh lines in it. There are a number of very funny lines but we don't laugh at them because we don't understand Hebrew humor. Hebrew humor is humor by exaggeration. When Jesus says things like, "Before you get the speck of sawdust out of your neighbor's eye, take the telephone pole out of your eye." Or "It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than a rich man to get into heaven." Or "See the Pharisees? They strain at a gnat and they swallow a camel."

We don't understand. We're going, "The Greek word for gnat is..." and totally miss the point. It goes right over our heads. We take all the humor out of God's word.

Matthew 12:37 *"He was interesting, He was appealing, He was delightful."*

At the start of a message, visitors are often uptight and members are often dull and recently Doug Fields was speaking and he did a little video clip just to light it up as an introduction to a message that he did.

((VIDEO HERE OF DOUG FIELDS LOOKING FOR HIS SERMON NOTES))

There's a real principle that we believe here at Saddleback and that is we take God seriously and we don't take ourselves seriously. That is the key to sanity in ministry.

The problem is we do the exact opposite. Most of the time we take ourselves way too seriously and we don't take God seriously enough. We've got it all reversed. Don't take yourself so seriously. You're just a human being. Use humor.

Benefits of humor

- It **RELAXES** people.

The unchurched especially don't expect it and it catches them off guard. It disarms them and lowers their defenses. By the way, the quickest way to defuse a hostile audience is to tell a joke on yourself. Use yourself as the butt of human and they're going, "This guy doesn't think he's so cool. He's just one of us. He's not some uppity big shot." It is affirming and relational.

- It makes **PAINFUL TRUTHS** more palatable.

A surgeon uses anesthetic before cutting you open. There's an old Arab proverb that says when you shoot an arrow of truth dip it in honey. Getting people to laugh at themselves is one of the most effective and quickest ways to get them to change. You can use humor to show that sin is stupid. Because sin really is. It's often illogical, irrational, self-defeating. And when you do something sinful you just need to dispose it for what it is and laugh at it.

You can use humor in discussing very sensitive areas. For instance, one of the things I have to preach on a lot here in Southern California is materialism so I'm always trying to use humor to get people to laugh at the stupidity of thinking that a man's life consists in the abundance of things he possesses. I've told the story of the yuppie on Ortega highway in his brand new car and he's driving around the corner and a big truck swerves and he swerves to miss the truck and he goes off the cliff. He jumps out of his brand new car just as it's going off

the cliff but it severs his right arm. He gets up, the truck driver stops and looks at him and says, "Are you all right buddy?" The guy saying, "My Mercedes!" The truck driver says, "Are you nuts? You lost your right arm!" The guy says, "My Rollex too!"

My funniest messages are stewardship messages. Because the most sensitive nerve in the human body is the one from the heart to the pocket book. When you talk about giving or you talk about tithing people are going to be really uptight. What I like to do in my stewardship messages is get them laughing and then I stick 'em!

It makes painful truth more palatable

- It creates **POSITIVE EMOTIONS.**

Joy, happiness, laughter, cheer. The Bible says there's therapeutic value in laughter. It says "*A cheerful heart is good medicine.*" Everybody's having a tough time and laughter lightens the load.

It is not a sin to make people feel good. You know as well as I do they're only ultimately going to feel good as they make Jesus Christ the Lord of their life and they're filled with the Holy Spirit. But it's ok to lighten loads. Humor is the seasoning of preaching. It's what we were talking about yesterday in the flavoring. In the flavoring process of CRAFT you look for the humor. It enhances the flavor. Humor's not the main meal but it is a seasoning and it makes it easier to swallow.

By the way, the funniest things are not jokes. The funniest things are those true to life incidences, kind of an Erma Bombeck or Dave Barry kind of humor. You're telling a story and everybody's going, "Yeah, I've been there!"

Use humor to create those positive emotions.

In closing, finally I want to wrap it up by talking a minute about the most important key to effective preaching. If I had to throw out everything I've told you in the last two days and say, "Just get this!"

THE MOST IMPORTANT KEY TO EFFECTIVE, PERSUASIVE PREACHING:

LOVE PEOPLE!

We must love people to the Lord. I hear guys say all the time, "I just love to preach." That never impresses me. I don't care if you love to preach or not. You may just be a ham. You may just love the attention you get standing in front of a crowd. You may just like the adrenaline rush you get when you're speaking. There's a lot of selfish motives for you loving to preach. I don't care if you love to preach. I want to know do you love the people you preach to? Because

**"If I have no love, my speech is no more than a noisy gong or a clanging bell."
1 Cor. 13:1 (GN)**

I say this with a great degree of humility but the people at Saddleback church would follow me anywhere. If I said, "Folks, let's charge hell with squirt guns!" half the congregation would be

saying, "Let's go. Right now!" Why? Because they know that I love these people. I love them with all my heart. I've given twenty years of my life for these people and by God's grace I intend to give the rest of my life for them. *"The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep."*

You can fake love for maybe one or two years but you can't fake it for twenty. You either do love them or you don't. They're going to figure it out pretty quick.

Before I begin every message I have the same ritual I've done every service, every Sunday I've preached for twenty years. When I come out here on this stage I look out over the crowd and I say in my mind, "God, I love these people. I love these people with all my heart. I love them and they love me and God, I love You and You love me. And You love these people. There is no fear in love *'Perfect love casts out all fear'* This is not an audience to be feared. This is a family to be loved. So Jesus Christ, love these people through me. If I don't have love I'm wasting my breath."

Studies have shown that the number one factor in being a great communicator is likability.

#1 Factor in Communication: LIKEABILITY!

If people like you, they're going to listen to you. If they don't like you they're not going to listen no matter what you have to say. You may have the greatest message in the world but if they don't like you, they're not going to listen to you.

How do you get people to like you? Simple. Love them. The church desperately needs great communicators who genuinely love people. They don't love the sound of their own voice. They don't love the preaching. They don't love the adulation. They love the people. The people that Jesus died for.

I want to close with this verse that we started this section with

"Concentrate...on being a workman with nothing to be ashamed of, and who knows how to use the word of truth to the best advantage." 2 Tim. 2:15 (Ph)

I want to challenge you as we conclude to commit the rest of your life to being a master communicator.

MY CHALLENGE TO YOU:

COMMIT THE REST OF YOUR LIFE TO LEARNING TO COMMUNICATE FOR LIFE CHANGE!

That is my challenge to you. That means you're going to have to keep reading and keep studying and keep learning and all kinds of stuff. I challenge you to commit the rest of your life to learning how to be a master communicator, a loving, learning master communicator.

How do you do that? Three ways.

HOW?

1. LISTEN TO SERMONS!

The value of *listening* to sermons, not just reading them:

You become a good communicator by **LISTENING** to good communicators!

The only way you're going to grow is to listen to other people preach and learn from them. Don't just read but listen. You become a good communicator by listening to good communicators. That's where you learn timing, delivery, pauses and all those kinds of things.

2. PRACTICE!

Paul: "Keep putting into practice all you learned from me and heard from me and saw me doing, and the God of peace will be with you." Phil. 4:9 (NLT)

Keep practicing what God is doing in your life. And as you go to multiple services, that will make you a better preacher.

3. ASK GOD TO HELP YOU GET BETTER!

And never forget that you're not speaking but God is going to speak through you, using your voice. Jeremiah 1:9

"Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth. He said to me, 'See, I am putting my words in your mouth.'" Jer. 1:9 (NCV)

Ask God to do that to you.

Here's what I want to leave you with.

When you figure out - I said this at the first session - When you figure out why you do what you do, God will show you how. So why do you preach? Why do you teach? Why do you spend this effort to learn and to study and to sharpen your skills, like you're doing here today and tomorrow?

We do this for Jesus' sake, because nothing is worth more than the fact that Jesus Christ, God's son, came to earth, stretched out his hands on a cross, let them nail him under that cross, shed his blood for you and me so that we don't ever have to be the same again.

I want us to close in prayer. I would like to pray for those of you who'd say, "I really do want to become a master communicator and I want to invest the rest of my life – time, energy, money, effort – whatever it takes to learning and sharpening the skills and crafting messages that God can use."

Prayer:

Would you pray this prayer after me? Say "God, I want You to use me. Anytime and anywhere in any way. I want to be a workman who is not ashamed but one who correctly handles the word of truth. Help me to sharpen my skills, help me to deepen my convictions,

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help me to develop my character. Help me to expand my knowledge and to enlarge my perspective. Make me more like You. Thank You for saving me. And thank You for calling me to serve You. Thank You for letting me have the task of teaching. Forgive me for the times I haven't prepared well and I want that to change. From this day forward I publicly commit to doing the hard work necessary to becoming a master communicator. Change me and grow me and use me in ways I never thought possible. Thank You for Your grace."

Lord, I love these people here today and I thank You so much in what they've done in sitting here for two days, listening and I know that You've brought us here from many different backgrounds and many different worlds, many different denominations, countries, yet we're all here as Your servants. We don't deserve to be saved. We're trophies of Your grace. Forgive us for taking the task of teaching for granted. Forgive for the times we've allowed television to rob us of sermon time. Help us to craft our messages with skill and with wisdom and with love. Help us to love the people we preach to and to be more concerned about them than about ourselves. Help us to lay down our lives for others, that You might use us. I thank You for these people today and I ask Your blessing, Your anointing, Your power in new ways. I pray that the things we've talked about in these two days these skills and these attitudes and these convictions would set us free to never again preach an academic sermon, to never again take something so exciting like Your word and bore people with it. We pray Lord that You would use us for life change. Help us to teach others to do the things that You've commanded us to do, to preach for obedience and preach for repentance and preach for life change. Help us to be driven by the purposes You've given us in Your word - for Your church and for our lives. And Lord we thank You in advance for lives that will be changed because of this conference. Thank You in advance for ministries that will be different. Thank You for churches that will grow. Thank You for the marriages that will be saved and the people's lives who will be put back together because of what You're going to do through us. We are so grateful and we just say thank You. Thank You God. Not for our glory, but for Jesus' sake. And we pray this in your name. Amen.

EIGHT QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU PREACH

- 1. Who are the listeners?**
- 2. What does the Bible say about their needs?**
- 3. What is the most practical way to say it?**

- 4. What is the most positive way to say it?**
- 5. What is the most encouraging way to say it?**
- 6. What is the simplest way to say it?**
- 7. What is the most personal way to say it?**
- 8. What is the most interesting way to say it?**